NEW
# NICK CARTER
WEEKLY

*Issued Weekly. By subscription $2.50 per year. Entered as Second-class Matter at the N. Y. Post Office, by* STREET & SMITH, *79-89 Seventh Ave., N. Y.*

**No. 557** NEW YORK, AUGUST 31, 1907. **Price, Five Cents**

# THE MAN FROM ARIZONA

—OR—

## NICK CARTER SWIMS TO VICTORY

BY THE AUTHOR OF "NICK CARTER."

With powerful strokes Nick overtook the fugitives. Drawing his revolver and leveling it at the "Kid's" head he called sharply: "Will you take the bullet or will you go back?"

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# The Man from Arizona;

## OR,

## NICK CARTER SWIMS TO VICTORY.

Edited by CHICKERING CARTER.

### CHAPTER I.

NICK CARTER IN DANGEROUS SURROUNDINGS.

Nick Carter was spending a week with the Coburns, at Circle-C Ranch, on Dry Beaver Creek, in Choteau County, Montana. He had come down the Missouri River on a house-boat from Major Corson's ranch, eighty miles up-stream, and because the notorious Kid Curry, outlaw, had returned from South America, and had chosen to hold up and rob the house-boat of the major, Nick had given chase, and not only rescued the two young ladies who were taken prisoners by the outlaws, but had recovered in full the money lost by the major.

But, although the detective captured the outlaw chief and delivered him over to one of the deputy sheriffs to be taken to jail, the balance of the outlaws had escaped to the mountains, placing themselves, for the time being, beyond pursuit.

It is true that Bob Coburn and Jim Thornhill had taken the trail of the outlaws, in the hope that they would be able to overhaul them, but the effort had been fruitless, and only the redoubtable "Kid" fell into the toils and was made a prisoner.

The people around that region had been for stringing the "Kid" up to the nearest tree or telegraph-pole, and trying him afterward; but the law-abiding citizens had finally prevailed, with the result that Curry was taken away by the deputy to the jail, and with a guard over him he was held there for trial.

There were many old counts against the outlaw chief—enough to hang him many times over, but everybody felt that the new ones, being fresher, would be most productive, and, accordingly, he was to be tried for the murder of Ira Benson, known familiarly as "Scar."

Nick had been prevailed upon to remain in the State as guest of the Coburn boys, not only to be present to give his testimony, but also to enjoy the time on the ranch, where he could ride the range with his friends, and otherwise enjoy himself as only it can be accomplished in that part of the great West.

But something happened to postpone the trial longer than it had been intended to delay it, with the result that almost two weeks elapsed after the capture of the "Kid" before the affair came off; and then the trial was attended from far and near by ranchmen and cow-punchers, who came from distances as great as two hundred miles, or even more.

For "Kid" Curry had earned an unenviable reputation

all over the State of Montana. He had passed nearly all the years of his life since he was old enough to sit in a saddle, in robbing and murdering people at will, and his ever-ready gun was always in evidence, for he could pull it and shoot it with the quickness of lightning, and with an unerring aim that could not be beaten.

Moreover, he had always been a reckless daredevil in his methods. He seemed to be without fear of death, and was absolutely devoid of nerves; and, as is generally the case with such a character as his, he was also without compassion.

It was said of him that with a few drinks inside of him he would shoot on the slightest provocation, just for the mere wanton love of killing—and there was no doubt that this was true.

The ranchmen around the neighborhood were inclined to censure Nick Carter for having taken the "Kid" alive, when he might just as well have shot him when he had the chance. Such a proceeding would have been so much simpler, so much more direct, would have spared so much trouble afterward, and would have saved the county the expense of having him tried.

For the "Kid" had been an eyesore to the community during all the years he had lived in it. Taken prisoner time after time, he had always managed to break jail and get back again to the mountains, where he knew every trail and pass as thoroughly as an Indian.

Once he had escaped and gone to South America, but now he was suddenly back among them again, and had resumed his old habits the moment he appeared.

And so it was that his trial attracted more than usual attention; so it was that men came to town to witness it from miles and leagues away.

Upon the morning of the day of the trial it was rumored that the town was full of the "Kid's" friends, as well as of those who would see justice done—justice being understood to consist of hanging him by the neck till he was dead, and riddling his body with bullets afterward.

Nick Carter rode into town with the Coburns during the afternoon of the day preceding the trial, and on the way they were joined by Jim Thornhill and Alick Black, so they made a party of six when they finally appeared there and repaired to the Copper Sam, where they could not only be provided with all they required to eat and drink, but where, also, they would be given a "shake-down" at night, in a room by themselves, which, in the present crowded condition of the place, was worth considering.

Nick Carter, of course, attracted considerable attention from everybody who had gathered there, for it was known that he was the man who had captured the "Kid" single-handed—a feat that was regarded as worthy of comment.

It was known presently, also, that he was none other than the famous Nick Carter, of New York, who had earned a reputation second to none as a detective of skill and daring, and so, no matter which way he turned, curious eyes followed him, and attention was called to him by nudges and low-spoken words.

If there is anything in the world that the detective dislikes, it is notoriety; if there is anything that he despises, it is fulsome praise and wordy compliments, and so he was more or less annoyed by the attention he attracted.

However, Western men, and men of the Montana variety in particular, are not given to the use of empty compliments, and they rarely bestow praise upon a person, no matter how deserved it may be, by more than a glance, or a nod of approval.

The town was filled with cow-punchers and old-time bull-whackers, from all over the State. Whoever had been able to leave the ranges to get there had come, and a more motley gathering of individuals could not have been imagined anywhere.

There were good men and bad men there. There were honest men, and also dishonest ones. It was like a fair-time in the East, with the difference in locality. As a matter of fact, it was like it only in the promiscuousness of the quality of the crowd.

Naturally, there were outfits which knew one another, and there were outfits which were strangers in the locality. There were many men who had blown in singly, and were strangers to each other, as well as to everybody else; there were bunches of twos and threes and fours who had arrived together, who knew only each other, but were unacquainted with anybody else.

Every bed was taken; every available room was crowded if it had happened—which it rarely did—that the occupants of them retired to them at the same time; every "shake-down" had been spoken for, or preempted; the stables and the corrals were filled with horses, and fences and posts throughout the town were utilized, also.

Saloons were wide open, and extra bartenders had been pressed into service. Card-games were everywhere, as soon as evening approached, and even during the day there were games in progress in many places. Impromptu gambling-houses had been erected, and in two instances tents had been brought to the town, and were utilized for this purpose.

The detective confessed quite frankly that he had never before witnessed a scene like it—and he also scented trouble in the air when it should come the time for the trial; trouble, sure enough, if the "Kid" should be convicted and sentenced, and the rumor about the presence there of many of his friends should turn out to be true.

And it was impossible for the law-abiding ones to determine who might be friends of the outlaw, and who were not. There were so many strangers there that

one could not sort them out as to quality and qualifications.

Late that night of his arrival in the town the detective was seated at a table in one corner of the barroom of the place where they had their shake-downs. With him were two of the Coburns—Bill and Bob—and while they were chatting together Wallace came in, with Jim Thornhill, and strode leisurely across the room to the place where Nick was sitting.

For a few moments the new arrivals indulged only in general talk, but presently, when the opportunity offered, Wallace Coburn leaned across the table toward the detective, and said, in a low tone:

"Nick, I have just heard an ugly kind of a rumor. I don't know how true or how false it may be, but it will be just as well to take it for what it is worth, and to be thoroughly on your guard after it."

"All right," replied the detective, in the same low tone. "What is it about?"

"It is about you, of course," was the reply.

"Well, what about it, Wally?"

"There is a tin-horn gambler here in the town who has somehow drifted up here from Arizona. Rumor has it that he has been in South America with the 'Kid,' and that they came back to this country together, only parting after they were almost here, the 'Kid' to come to this place and the sport to seek his old haunts in Arizona. Remember, I am telling you only what I have heard as rumor."

"I remember; but I don't quite see, as yet, how it affects me, Wallace."

"Well, the story goes on that they had made it up to get together a little later on, and it is said that Arizona—that is how he is called here, for want of a better name—has come up here now only to keep an appointment with the 'Kid,' and that he did not know of Curry's capture until he was most here."

"All right. What else?"

"Rumor goes on to say that the two had agreed to get a lot of cutthroats like themselves together, and to organize the most complete gang of outlaws that this State has known for many years."

"I should think that that might be quite true," remarked the detective musingly.

"Well, it goes on to say that Arizona has picked up a lot of old cronies of his, and has brought them up here with him. That they slipped into the town on the quiet, and that now it is their game to pretend that they are entirely unknown to one another."

The detective nodded. "Go on," he said.

"According to the tale I've heard, as soon as Arizona heard what had happened, and that the 'Kid' was not only captured, but was to be tried for his life, he passed around the word to his friends to lay low, and wait for developments."

The detective nodded again, and Wallace went on:

"It's my opinion, Nick, that it is all only too true."

"It sounds as if it might be; but what of it?"

"This: Arizona has heard that your evidence is the only really vital thing in this case, and that it will serve to hang the 'Kid,' good and plenty."

"I guess there is no doubt of that," smiled Nick.

"And he has also been told that if you do not give that evidence to the court it is more than likely that the 'Kid' will be acquitted. Nobody is here who saw him shoot Scar Benson, but yourself, is there? The two girls whom you rescued, and who saw it, are in the East. Grey Feather, the Indian, cannot be found; so you see yours is really the only direct evidence, after all."

"Yes; I see," said the detective.

"Well, Arizona has given it out among a few who have happened to hear him, that before the night is over he means to pick a quarrel with you, and kill you; and if he does succeed in starting the quarrel, it is to be a signal for a general fight all around."

## CHAPTER II.

### ABOUT THE MAN FROM ARIZONA.

"All this is rather interesting," said the detective, coolly lighting a cigar; "but all the same, Wallace, I can see the logic of what you say—from the standpoint of Curry's old associates."

"The worst of it is," continued Wallace Coburn, "I don't know this fellow Arizona by sight, and I haven't been able to spot him. I haven't been able to find anybody who does know him well enough to point him out to me."

"So, as far as you know, he may be in this room right now?" asked one of his brothers.

"Exactly."

Bob Coburn and Thornhill turned half-way in their chairs and calmly surveyed the room, with its admixture of characters grouped within it.

"I reckon there are about a hundred men in this place right now," muttered Thornhill, "and there ain't half a dozen in the bunch that I know, either. Arizona might well be here, and he probably is, if he is looking for Nick. How long have we been here, Carter?"

"We have been seated at this table about half an hour, I should say," replied Nick.

"Then if he is looking for you, it is safe to suppose that somebody has told him where to find you; and if he found that out, he has blown in here before this, you can bet your pile on that—that is, if he means business."

"Couldn't you get any sort of description of him, at all?" asked the detective of Wallace.

"Nary a descrip, Nick. I only know that he's a sort of a sport—a regular tin-horn, as I make it out, and

that he's from Arizona. I mean by that, that Arizona was his home before he met up with the 'Kid' at all, and they went to South America together."

"He doubtless belongs to the regular type of 'bad man,' eh?"

"I didn't know that there was a regular type," said Thornhill quietly.

"Well," remarked Nick, laughing, "if he is looking for me, and if he intends to force a quarrel upon me, it is safe to say that he will make himself known before the evening is over."

"I was thinking——" began Wallace, and stopped.

"What were you thinking?" asked Nick.

"Maybe it won't meet with your approval when I tell you what I was thinking about, Nick."

"All the same, let me hear it."

"I was wondering if it wouldn't be as well if you were to make yourself rather scarce around here for the rest of the evening, Nick."

"What do you mean? Run away?"

"Yes, if you want to put it in that way."

"That is hardly what you'd expect of me, is it?"

"No, Nick; don't misunderstand me, but you see that whole case in the morning depends upon your testimony. We don't want the 'Kid' to have any loophole to get out through, and as you are the whole proposition, it looks to me as if it would be right for you to disappear until court is called in the morning."

"Would you do it, Wallace, if you were in my place?"

"No: I'm hanged if I would, case, or no case."

"Then can you hardly expect me to do so?"

"The cases are different, Nick."

"How so?"

"Well, for one thing, you don't live here, and you haven't got any reputation to keep up around these parts. It wouldn't make any difference to your future, you know, if you did skip out for the time."

"But all the same——"

"And, then," interrupted Wallace, "in addition to that, you are a tenderfoot. Nothing is surprising in a tenderfoot, you know."

"I suppose not."

"And, then, there is another thing, too."

"What is that?"

"You are not supposed to know anything about the talk that Arizon is looking for you, and so, if you should disappear for the rest of the evening, it would be thought only an accident that you had gone. It would never occur to the crowd that you had dodged."

"But, you see, I *do* know that Arizona is looking for me."

"You didn't know it till I told you."

"That is true enough, but I do know it now."

"Yes. I was a fool, that's all."

"Why so?"

"I ought to have made some excuse to get you away from here and kept you away without letting you know anything about this business."

"Do you think I would have thanked you for such a thing as that? Would you have thanked me if the cases were reversed, and I should do that sort of thing to you?"

"I can't say I would, Nick."

"You'd be much more inclined to shoot me, wouldn't you?"

"Maybe I would."

"Well, set your mind at rest. I am not going to run away, whatever happens; and, besides, I think that perhaps it will be a good thing if Arizona should show his hand to-night."

"Why?"

"Because it will post us as to who his friends are."

"I don't know what good that will do us if you are not able to appear and give your testimony to-morrow."

"Oh, I will appear, all right, and I will present my testimony, too."

"You won't be likely to do so, if Arizona gets the drop on you. I hear that he is a sure bad man."

"A regular out-and-out gun-fighter, eh?"

"That's what they say, Nick."

"All the same I think I am willing to take my chances with him. I am reasonably quick with a gun myself."

"Oh, I know that; but this will be a case of shoot, if it gets to that point. All that I am afraid of is that you will hesitate to let go, you're so plumb careful about taking the life of a bit of vermin like that. You might have shot the 'Kid' once and we'd never have had all this bother—but you didn't."

"It never occurred to me to do so, Wallace."

"Well, you wouldn't have done it if it had occurred to you."

"No; I would not—under the circumstances."

"I wish I might have had the chance you had. Kid Curry wouldn't be here awaiting trial now. I'll tell you that—and some more."

"You would have done just as I did, Wallace," said the detective, smiling, "and you know it. You wouldn't shoot a man, no matter how many kinds of a thief and cattle-rustler he might happen to be, without giving him a show for his life."

"I don't suppose I would, when all's said, Nick."

"I would rather welcome this planned attack upon me by the man Arizona if I only knew how to recognize him when I see him," said the detective musingly.

"Oh, it's safe to say that he'll be a big, raw-boned gazaboe with a week's growth uh hair on his chin, a red handkerchief around his throat, and all that," drawled Black. "He is probably one uh them air strutters what goes around tellin' that they come from the top uh Kickapoo Creek, that the farther up they come from the worse

they are, and that he comes plumb from the top. I reckon he's that sort."

"More'n likely," assented Bill Coburn.

"Yes," said Thornhill, "and with a hull arsenal strapped tuh both sides uh him, and a knife 'r two in sight in his belt. He'll be jest about that kind, Nick."

"And he'll sure have a swagger with him, don't forget that," murmured Bob Coburn, rolling a cigarette. "Maybe that's him now, moseyin' over this way from the faro layout."

They all raised their eyes toward the man whom Bob had indicated, but that individual, evidently entirely innocent of the accusation, did not appear to even see our friends at the table, but turned aside before he got to them, and passed out through the door.

"That wasn't him," said Black, shaking his head. "I say, Wallace, where did you pick up those rumors, anyhow?"

"Well, Alick, they sort uh blew in upon me, so tuh speak. I heard them third-handed, I think, anyhow. That is, the feller who told me had been told by another who told him, and that other one had heard it by accident from a fourth party, so there wasn't any tracing it backward, you see."

"Yes; I see. I reckon it's all poppycock, anyhow."

"Maybe it is."

"By the way," said Nick, "have any of you seen or heard anything of the others of Kid Curry's real gang? I mean the ones he had with him when they robbed the major, and stole the two girls away from the boat?"

Each man there shook his head in the negative, to indicate that he had heard nothing, and the detective continued:

"I didn't know but that Shorty, or Blue-nose, or the fellow who was called Ike, or even Jew Jake himself, might have had the assurance to blow into town. It has occurred to me that they might even attempt some disguise in order to do it safely."

"If any of them are here, I haven't heard about it," said Wallace; "but all the same, it wouldn't be strange if the hull outfit was hanging around here somewhere, keeping under cover a leetle, maybe, but on hand to be here if anything happens."

"I don't reckon that any uh them would dare risk it," said Bob Coburn, blowing a cloud of smoke into the air. "It would be altogether too risky for them just now. If one uh them gazaboes was caught here now and the boys were onto it, there wouldn't be no trial for them, I can tell you that. The only wondeh tuh me is that they wait to let the 'Kid' be tried."

"They wouldn't, only that it's a dead open and shut that the jury'll find him guilty, and that the judge'll sentence him to be hung," said Black dryly. "In fact, the boys have attended to that part of it already. They know now what the verdict will be."

"Then what becomes of the importance of my testimony?" asked Nick, smiling.

"It's wanted for the sake uh keepin' up appearances, Nick."

"But, according to what you say, the 'Kid' is bound to be sentenced and hung, anyhow."

"That's about the size of it."

"Maybe it would be a good idea if we should get out uh here and stroll around the town for a while," suggested Bill Coburn. "There ain't no good uh settin' here and waitin' for the chap from Arizona tuh show up, as I can see. But I want tuh say this before we move. We'll jest keep close tuhgether for the rest uh the night, and we'll all keep close tuh Nick, no matter what happens. Is that agreed?"

"It sure is," they assented.

"I think," said Nick quietly, remaining seated in his chair when the others rose from theirs, that it will be better to remain where we are. If Arizona is looking for me, he is bound to find me before the night is over, and I would rather he would discover me right at this table, with my back toward the nearest wall, than anywhere else. He can't very well get behind me here, you see, while out in the street he might hit me in the back, by accident."

They all resumed their chairs, and the conversation was about to be resumed where it had been left off, when a soft and perfectly refined voice startled them all, for not one had noticed the approach of a stranger.

And this stranger had managed to approach quite near to them, unnoticed, so that he might even have been within hearing for some time—long enough to have overheard some of the remarks that had been made about the case generally, and about the man Arizona in particular.

## CHAPTER III.

### ARIZONA, THE TIN-HORN GAMBLER.

"Pardon me, gentlemen," said the stranger, stepping forward until he was quite close to them. "I hope I don't intrude upon you."

"I reckon not," said Wallace Coburn quietly; "not if there is anything we can do for you, or any information that we can give you."

"If you happen to be lookin' for a shake-down," volunteered Thornhill, "I'll tell you right now that you'll have to hang yourself up to a fly-speck on the wall. It's about the only kind you'll find in town, but the lord only knows there are enough of them—and some more."

"I am a total stranger here," continued the man, quietly drawing forward an extra chair, and seating himself upon it. "In fact, I can't say that there is a man in town whom I know, or who knows me."

"That's the brand of a good many who are here tonight," said Bob.

"It occurred to me," continued the stranger, smiling upon them all, and in such a manner that he somehow managed to include them all in it, "that we might start something to pass away the time—some sort of a game, you know."

"I reckon we hadn't thought about that, sir," said Black. "There are plenty of games going here to-night, if you are anxious to get into one."

"I have looked them all over rather carefully," said the stranger mildly, "and I have noticed that every game seems to be crowded. That made me think that perhaps a fresh one might be started. And then I spied this table with you six gentlemen seated around it, and made bold to approach you. Are any of you players?"

"I reckon we all know one card from another," said Wallace; "but we ain't thought about settin' intuh a game as yet."

"Well, what do you say, gentlemen? Shall we start one? You are all friends, and I am a stranger, but that won't make any difference to me, if you are satisfied."

"What do you say, boys?" asked Thornhill, who was always eager for a game of cards, and who adored the old game of pitch.

Nick Carter had uttered no word since the advent of the stranger, but now, before any of his friends around the table could reply, he remarked quietly, directly addressing the newcomer:

"Are you from Arizona, sir?"

The stranger started perceptibly, and his eyes narrowed ever so little. He had unusually white skin for any part of the country, but in that particular locality it was noticeable; but, even so, it paled a little at the detective's sudden question.

But he smiled coldly, showing an even row of milk-white teeth, and he touched caressingly the spot on his upper lip, where his mustache would have been, had he worn one, and he replied at once, and easily:

"I am, indeed, from Arizona, but I cannot guess how you happen to know it."

Nick ignored the implied question, and asked another.

"Are you not called 'Arizona' by your intimates?" he asked.

"Indeed, sir, you amaze me," was the now perfectly cool reply, given with a repetition of the suave smile. "I had no idea that I wore my name branded upon me anywhere, and still less that I should meet up with anybody here who knew me down there."

"Then I am correct?" asked the detective persistently.

"You are entirely correct; yes, sir."

"Permit me, then, to introduce myself. I am Nicholas Carter, of New York."

"Indeed! Ah! I understand now; you are the principal witness against the 'Kid,' eh?"

"About that," assented Nick.

"I have heard about you; but you had not been pointed out to me in the street. Glad to meet up with you, Mr. Carter."

"I have heard about you, also," said Nick, fixing his keen eyes upon the death-white face of the gambler. "I have heard even more than that. I have been told that you are looking for me. Is it true?"

"I? Looking for you? I cannot possibly see what occasion I would have to be looking for you, sir. Of course, you don't mean by that to insinuate that I am, or have been, 'looking for you,' in the sense in which that expression is generally used in the West?"

"That is what I meant—precisely, Arizona," replied Nick coolly. "That is exactly what I have been told."

"Indeed. You surprise me. May I venture who your informant might be?"

"Not yet; not until you have replied to my question."

"Indeed, sir! And that question was—what, may I ask?"

The stranger's eyes were glinting coldly now, and he was perfectly self-possessed, and also evidently ready to permit the talk to turn to a quarrel, if necessary. But Nick, instead of permitting himself to be drawn into a game where a quarrel could be forced upon him suddenly, had preferred to force matters and to bring them to an issue at once.

"The question was, *are* you looking for me, and *have you been* looking for me?"

"I am not now looking for you, Mr. Carter. I trust that you will be satisfied with that answer."

"No; it does not satisfy me at all. Have you been looking for me? Have you let it be heard around the town that you were looking for me?"

"Really, sir, I did not come here to be——"

"That will about do for you, Arizona," said Nick, interrupting him contemptuously. "And I would advise you not to move that delicate white hand of yours any nearer to that breast pocket. It is a handy place for a man who is dressed as you are, to carry a gun, for the reason that one is not apt to suspect that it is there. Put your hands out upon the table, if you please, for I have got you covered through my pocket. That is better. Now, perhaps, you will answer my questions."

"If you call this courteous treatment to extend to a stranger in your——" began Arizona hotly, but Nick interrupted him again.

"You butted into this crowd without being asked," he said. "When you do that sort of thing in Montana, you have to take the consequences."

"I am always ready to take the consequences of my acts," replied the stranger.

"That is a good idea. I expect there are a good many of them in the past, however, for which the consequences have not yet arrived. You know perfectly well who I am, don't you, Arizona?"

"It's none of your business whether I do, or not, Mr.

Carter." The answer was coldly insolent. He did not manifest the least excitement; but Nick continued, imperturbably:

"You know that I am Nick Carter, the detective. You know that I am from New York. You know that it was I who captured and arrested Kid Curry, and you know that it is my testimony that is deemed necessary to hang him to-morrow. Eh? You know all that, don't you?"

"I have been told as much—yes."

"Well, I will tell you a few things that I know. They may interest you."

"I suppose you know it *all*, don't you? I have always been led to understand that you are one of that sort, Carter."

"I know that you are a professional gambler. I know that by your hands and your style, as well as by the expression in your eyes. A gambler can never hide that from one who has made it a study."

"Indeed."

"I know, also, that you and the 'Kid' have been partners in South America. I know that you came north together. I know that you went to Arizona while he came here, and that you had planned to get together again up here, and do a little business in partnership, with the help of some other thieves like yourselves."

"It is extremely fortunate for you, Carter, that you have got the drop on me while you say that; and I might suggest to you that it is sometimes called cowardly to talk like that under such circumstances."

"Cowardice and bravery don't count where you are concerned, Arizona. But there is another thing that I would like to tell you. I know considerably more about you than I have told, for I remember that cold, hard face of yours, and those beady, snaky eyes, also. You were in Nevada before you went to Arizona. You used to be at a town called Belmont, not far from the Smoky Valley, in the days when Belmont was a great mining-camp. I saw you there, or near there, once, Arizona—and you weren't called by that name, then, either. I recognized you by your velvet voice, the moment you spoke to us, and before I took the trouble to look at you carefully."

The face of the stranger was decidedly paler now and his eyes were glittering dangerously. It would, indeed, have been reckless talk to address to him if Nick had not had the drop on him so surely.

"I think you have made a mistake, for once in your life, Nick Carter," he managed to say, moistening his lips with his tongue, for the exigency of the moment had rendered them unduly dry.

"Not at all," replied Nick suavely; and then, without removing his eyes from their careful watch of Arizona, he addressed the others, who had sat silently listening to what had been said.

"Wallace," he said, "and you, Bill, and Bob, and Alick, and Jim—this is the man we have heard about, and have been talking about. This is the Arizona who is a partner with the 'Kid,' and who has come here to this place to save Curry from the consequences of his crimes, if he can do it. This is the man who has given out to a select few that he would find Nick Carter and do him before the night was over. This is the tin-horn gambler who was, years ago, a road-agent in Nevada, who ran a gambling-house in Reno once, and afterward another one in Belmont, when that place was a great mining-town. This is the blackleg who would have roped us into a game, and succeeded in robbing us all before he found an excuse to shoot me across the table, and he would not have hesitated to make such an excuse, and take his chances after doing it. You needn't squirm, Arizona, for you've got to hear the truth; and, after that, my friends will decide what is to be done with you."

"I'll call to the others in this room for protection against such an outrage as you are committing," Arizona said, half-between his teeth, simulating outraged indignation at the proceeding.

"If you do—if you so much as raise your voice, Arizona," said Bob Coburn quietly, "I'll plug yuh myself. I reckon we've all got yuh covered by this time."

"Go on, Nick," muttered Thornhill. "That story uh your'n is interestin'; it sure is."

"Well, Arizona likes to take the names of the States he happens to be in. If he stays up here long enough, he'll be calling himself Montana—only I don't think he is likely to be here long enough for that."

"No more do I," murmured Wallace meaningly. "This climate ain't right healthy for such as him. Go on, Nick."

"Down there, around Belmont, before he was run out of town with a coat of pitch and a few feathers for a covering—a regular tailor-made suit that was—he was called Nevada; only it was Black Nevada. Very properly so, too."

"Sure thing, Nick. What else?" muttered Thornhill.

"He had an outfit down there, in those days, that he called the 'Twenty-one,' and they were twenty-one cutthroats and ruffians of the worst order. They were stage-robbers, sluice-robbers, hold-ups, and everything of the sort they could turn their talents to. I supposed that Black Nevada was dead until I heard his voice just now, and since I have heard it, and looked at him again, I am not surprised that he thinks he would like to get me, if he can. There is an old grudge that he would like to square up, if he can get the chance. Now, Arizona, as you prefer to be called just now, have you got anything to say to all that?"

"You seem to have the floor yourself, Carter," was the calm reply.

"Well, have you got anything to say why you shouldn't be run out of town to-night? If you have, you'd better say it, for in about three minutes I'm going to advise my friends to make up a party to see you started. If you've got anything to say, say it now, Arizona."

## CHAPTER IV.

### A FIGHT WITHOUT BLOODSHED.

It is safe to say that in an ordinary assemblage in the East, Arizona would readily have passed inspection as a parson, for outwardly he had the appearance of one, and it was evident that it was his purpose to assume such a harmless character.

His costume was of black, and the coat was a frock. The waistcoat alone was unlike what a minister would have worn, for it was low-cut, like the vest to an evening suit, and a huge diamond glittered in the very center of the wide expanse of shirt-front that showed. His collar was of the military shape, set off the more plainly by the presence of a black string tie. His hair was worn rather long, and was brushed straight back from his death's head forehead. He was clean shaven, and his complexion was almost chalky in whiteness. The lines of his mouth were thin and cruel, and his eyes were small, and beady, and black, sometimes glittering like the eyes of a snake, and at other times chillingly cold and deadly in the suggested expression of them.

In stature, he was rather under the medium height, but his shoulders were broad and his chest was deep, denoting great physical strength which his costume and his general air served to conceal.

If he wore a weapon, it did not show, but there was no doubt that he was "heeled" to the limit, for all that.

His hands were as white and delicate as a woman's, the fingers being long and tapering, as they are sometimes noticeable in gamblers, although I have seen and known gamblers whose hands looked as if they belonged to longshoremen.

Taken altogether he was a man at whom one would not have glanced a second time because of anything about him that was calculated to attract attention, but if one did devote a second glance upon him, the observer would have decided at once that he was "dangerous."

And now, when the detective delivered himself of the last remark recorded here, Arizona remained, outwardly, at least, unmoved. He seemed to have recovered all his self-possession and assurance, and to be once more a perfect master of himself, capable of meeting and contending with any emergency that might arise.

His eyes had taken upon themselves that deadly cold expression that has been described, and while Nick was talking, Arizona kept them fixed steadily upon Nick's face. There was also a suggestion of a smile flitting about his thin, straight lips, and he looked exceedingly dangerous somehow, notwithstanding the fact that he kept his hands upon the table, resting there, palms down, as Nick had ordered him to do.

The reader has already surmised from the detective's words that these two had had other experiences in the past, and Nick knew that Arizona remembered him as well and perfectly as he remembered Arizona under the name of Black Nevada.

"I don't know that there is any call for me to make any statement under the circumstances," he replied to Nick slowly. "You have got the drop on me, and so have all of you. I don't see that I stand much show any way you can put it. It's a case of heads you win, and tails I lose, isn't it?"

"That's about the size of it; it sure is," remarked Thornhill, sotto voce.

"I am addressing my remarks to Mr. Carter, Thornhill," remarked the gambler coldly. "I'd be obliged to you if you'd keep that big trap of yours shut."

"Oho! Gittin' sassy, ain't yuh?" laughed Thornhill. "Well, Tin-horn, say your say, and do it quick, for we're going to show you the way out uh town purty soon. Speak up like a little man, now, and have it over with."

"Of course I'll go if I've got to do it," said Arizona. "But I protest that it isn't fair. You haven't anything to go by but the word of this detective, and——"

"That'll about do on that point, Arizona," interrupted Wallace Coburn quietly. "We'd like an answer from yuh about that statement uh your'n that yuh were lookin' for Nick."

"What do you wish me to say, then?"

"Well, Nick seems to have got your pedigree down purty fine, and we would like tuh know if you admit it all, or if there's got tuh be any sort uh trouble here."

"What else can I do but admit it?"

"Now you're a-talkin', Arizona!"

"If there weren't six of you, and if you didn't all have the drop on me, as you have, I can tell you right now that this wouldn't be such an easy matter as it appears. I'm ready, if you're going to escort me to the town limits, gentlemen."

"We'd like to know, first, how many men you brought here with you. Tell us that."

"I didn't bring any men with me at all."

"I suppose yuh know that you're a liar, Arizona!"

"And I suppose you know that it's perfectly safe for you to make that remark, having the drop on me. Come on, if you're going to show me out of town."

He rose from his chair as he made this remark, and he half-turned away from them.

It will never be known if he made a sign to others at that instant; if he did so, it was done so expertly that it was invisible to the six friends who were grouped around the table, and who rose from their chairs at the same instant he did so.

But it is certain that something happened instantly.

It was more than likely, as the circumstances were discussed afterward, that Arizona had brought a lot of his friends with him into the saloon, and that when he stepped forward to butt in upon our friends seated at the table

those same companions of his remained where they could watch narrowly everything that occurred at that table.

Anyhow, when he rose from his chair, and half-turned, a dozen men out of the crowd that was in the room detached themselves from various groups, and stepped quickly forward toward him, so that even before the detective and those who were with him could anticipate what was to happen, they were practically surrounded.

And then, Arizona, as if he had eyes in the back of his head, with which to see the approach of his friends, leaped suddenly backward, moving in that direction as expertly as a crab, and in an instant his slight form was surrounded and swallowed up by the tall ones of his own followers.

Perhaps the eyes of Nick Carter and his companions were fixed so steadily upon Arizona himself that not one of them noticed the advance of the other outlaws toward them until they were sufficiently close to enable Arizona to spring backward among them.

It is certain that he did it, and that he accomplished it without a shot being fired; and it is also certain that before any one of our party realized what was happening they found themselves confronted by a dozen scowling border giants, each with their hands resting on their hips, and each with guns in their hands, ready for instant use.

And so quietly was it all accomplished that not another person in that saloon save those directly interested in the scene realized what was happening.

The games continued just the same, and apparently not an eye was raised to look in their direction.

It was a moment fraught with imminent danger for every person there.

The slightest aggressive move made by either party would have brought about a gun-fight that would have resulted in the instant death of many of them on both sides, and there was not one there who did not realize it thoroughly.

For a moment—one of those intervals of time which seem so much longer than they really are—the two sides stood quite still, staring at each other; a dozen border ruffians on one side, and half a dozen gentlemen on the other, and then the voice of Arizona sounded from the very center of his bunch of followers.

"What do you say, my friends—shall we call it a draw?" he asked coldly, addressing Nick Carter directly.

Nick did not reply. He regarded it as his duty to permit Wallace Coburn to be spokesman for his side of the controversy; and Arizona went on:

"I guess you'd better decide to call it a draw, Carter. I am willing if you are. We are two to one as we stand, and we're not particular whether you want a fight, or prefer to let it go without one. Only I tell you that if it does come to a fight, there will be more than one dead man to carry out of this place when it is over."

"And you will be the first one of the lot—to be killed," replied Nick, as coolly.

"I'll take my chances as to that, Carter. I didn't come here without friends, as you see; and these few who are here aren't half of them, either. They're scattered——"

What he intended to say will never be known, for it was suddenly interrupted.

At that instant, the man who was standing directly in front of Arizona moved to one side, thus leaving a lane open, through which the detective could see Arizona plainly, and in that instant he resolved to take his chances of being killed, and to capture Arizona, no matter what the effort to do so might cost him.

Therefore, the instant that the man in front of the gambler moved to one side, Nick, with the quickness of a cat, leaped forward straight through the opening, and seized him.

The attack was made so suddenly, and was so unexpected—for both sides to that scene had decided that it would be called a draw—that Nick was across the intervening space, and had seized the man before a trigger was pulled and a shot fired; but it seemed as if a score of shots were fired at the same instant, then, and the uproar that followed in that saloon is indescribable.

There had been no suggestion of a fight anywhere in the room until then.

Every man there had been interested in his own particular occupation, to the exclusion of everything else, and the precipitation of the fight was a surprise all around.

Everybody jumped, and everybody pulled his gun when he did so.

Many of them, knowing that they had no part in any row that had been started, dived under tables, or sought to conceal themselves elsewhere. Some leaped over the bar and crouched behind it; and some there were who added to the excitement by firing their guns heedlessly—for always in such a place there are men who each believes himself to be the only one present who might be made the object of a sudden attack.

But Nick was too close to Arizona's men to be hit.

He had passed through the opening among them so suddenly that not one of them could risk a shot at him, and he and Arizona were on the floor together when the shots were sent whizzing around the room.

The tall outlaw who had stood in front of Arizona, and who had moved aside the instant before the detective made the jump, fell to the floor instantly, and as for the remaining guns, each one who fired seemed to have the same idea about his own particular duty, and the lights went out, as if by magic.

It seemed as if everybody there had suddenly determined that the only safe way out of that row was to shoot out the lights, and, as if by some miracle, each man had selected a different light to shoot at, so that they all went out at once, or practically so.

Nick and the gambler had barely touched the floor before the room was in darkness, and in the midst of an uproar that is impossible to describe.

Arizona fought like a tiger, too, in the short interval he was permitted to do so; but Nick Carter's fingers gripped his throat, shut off his wind, and Nick's strong arms held him so that he could not escape.

And then, as suddenly as that first fusillade of bullets had been fired, silence succeeded the noise. Nothing could be heard save a few breathless curses.

Everybody there was amazed by the suddenness with which the lights had gone out; it was as if they were electric lights and somebody had turned off the switch. In that black darkness that followed, one was as apt to hit a friend as a foe, and each man held his fire as a consequence.

Then the front doors were thrown open; the light flowed in from the street, and the tall form of the sheriff could be seen against it in the doorway. Behind him were half a dozen determined men, his deputies, sworn in for the trial of the "Kid"; and the sheriff happened to be one of those rare men who mean business every time they speak. Through the silence, his clear voice could be plainly heard as he shouted out:

"The man who fires the next shot in this place will be strung up without trial if I can catch him! Light the lamps, Copper Sam. I want to find out what the trouble is."

## CHAPTER V.

### THE SHERIFF TAKES A HAND.

One of the first requisites for running a saloon in a range-town of central Montana is to always have on hand three or four extra supplies of lamps. The proprietor never knows when his illuminating properties will be shot to pieces.

Sometimes those incidents are brought about as this one was, but oftener they are shot out playfully; just for the fun of the thing, and with no harm intended to anybody; but the extra lamps must always be there if the proprietor doesn't want to have to shut up from time to time for want of them.

There is always one supply kept in a closet behind the bar, ready for instant use, and others are stored away ready to be brought out when they are needed; and when the supply gets low enough so there is danger of its running out, it is renewed with the same zeal that the supply of whisky is augmented.

Everybody who lived within two hundred miles of that town knew the sheriff of the county, or if they did not know him, they knew about him; and those who lived still farther away had already been there long enough to have heard about him.

Everybody knew that as a proposition he was not to be fooled with, and that he had a way of forcing obedience even from the most unruly.

And so when he appeared in the doorway, with his deputies at his back, and, announcing who he was, ordered that the fight be stopped, there was that about him and his reputation which compelled a willing obedience at once.

One might have heard a pin drop for a moment following upon his short speech, and then the voice of Copper Sam came from behind the bar, where he had already taken refuge from the bullets.

"Jest a minnut, sheriff," he called out, "and I'll sure obleege yuh. I reckon there ain't no harm done here, either."

The sheriff's clear voice sounded again, even more clearly than before.

"While Copper is lightin' them lamps, I'll thank yuh all to stand in your tracks, jest where yuh be now," he said. "It wouldn't be safe for any uh you to try tuh slip out uh any uh the doors, either, because I've got men stationed at each one of 'em. Now, Copper!"

One by one the lights appeared and glowed upon the bar; and as Copper placed them there, his bartenders carried them to the brackets against the walls and the hanging chandeliers over the center of the room.

In a very few minutes the room was again in a glow of light, as it had been before the row began; and then men began to look at each other, to discover who had started it, for, aside from the few who had been directly connected with it, nobody knew a thing about it.

And then a strange scene presented itself to the view of all.

The middle of the room had been silently cleared of occupants—save for two persons—during that interval of darkness. The Coburn boys, with Thornhill and Black, had drawn themselves back against the wall, and had dropped their guns out of sight from the others. The men who had stepped forward so quickly, to group themselves around Arizona, had melted away and scattered themselves among the crowd while the darkness lasted, so that now the twelve of them were each in a different part of the room, and each one had managed to hide himself behind some other men.

The space in the middle of the room was entirely clear save for the two persons already referred to, and those two were Nick Carter and the gambler, Arizona.

Nick, in the short, sharp struggle with Arizona, had managed to slip his ever-ready handcuffs upon the wrists of the gambler, and now the man stood with his hands locked together behind his back, and with Nick Carter's left hand gripping his neck from behind, while Nick's right hand was thrust negligently into the side pocket of his own coat, where it grasped a revolver, the muzzle of which was pointed at his captive.

But the gun did not show, and, save for the hand-

cuffed man, held in the grasp of the detective from the East, the scene was as peaceful as if a shot had never been fired in that room.

But all eyes were instantly fixed upon those two men, and even the Coburn boys were surprised, as were, of course, Arizona's friends, who must have believed until that moment that their chief had withdrawn into the crowd with them.

The sheriff was surprised, also, for he stepped quickly forward, half-way to Nick, when he stopped, and with his gun in his hand, he said:

"What does this mean, Mr. Carter?"

"It appears to mean that I have got a prisoner for you," replied Nick, smiling.

"Who is the man? What have you got him for?" demanded the sheriff. "I didn't know that you had been deputized to do any arresting of men in this town, Carter."

"I haven't been authorized to do so, sheriff, but the necessity arose, and I did it."

"I'll jest hear about that necessity, if you don't mind, Carter."

"Well, sheriff, I am the principal witness for to-morrow, or next day, or whenever the real trial of the 'Kid' comes off, as you know."

"Yes. I know that much."

"This fellow is called Arizona—now. He used to go by another name when I first knew him. He has been giving it out around that he was going to put me out of the way so that I wouldn't be able to testify against the 'Kid,' and he has brought between a dozen and a score of men here with him to attempt the delivery of Curry, if the trial happens to go against him."

"How do you know all this, Carter?"

"Wallace Coburn heard it first, and just before the shooting began Arizona admitted it."

"Did you do that, Arizona?" asked the sheriff, turning his clear eyes upon the gambler.

"No, I didn't. The man is a liar——"

"Drop that! Wallace Coburn, what do you know about this affair?"

"I know that Carter speaks the truth. It was I who brought the news to him that Arizona was lookin' for him; and we hadn't been talking about it only a few minutes when Arizona shows up, with a cold dozen uh men at his back. He meant business, he did."

"Where are the dozen men now?"

"Yuh can search me, sheriff. They have melted away into the crowd, and the thing all happened so sudden that I don't believe I could identify one of 'em."

"Who fired the first shot in the fight? But, wait; has anybody been hurt? I 'most forgot to ask about that. If anybody has been hit, I want to know it right now."

One man stepped forward and exhibited a place where a notch had been taken out of one of his ears, but that was the only casualty.

"I reckon that we'll pass that up," said the sheriff dryly. "Now, Wallace, who fired the first shot?"

"You can search me. I know that I didn't. I plugged for two uh the lights—and got 'em, too."

"Arizona's friends pulled first," said Thornhill, "if you'll allow me to butt in."

"Where are they. Can you identify any uh them, Jim?"

"I reckon I cayn't, sheriff. I'm like Wallace; I didn't have a chance to get a look at any uh them."

"Can you, Carter?"

The detective shook his head. He knew that under the present strain it would be far from policy to do so. The slightest thing might instantly precipitate a second row, which would not be as bloodless as the first one.

"I am afraid not, sheriff," he said.

"What's that other name you went by, and where was yuh when you used it, Arizony," the sheriff demanded now, turning again to the gambler.

"Are you going to take the word of these——" began Arizona; but the sheriff held up one hand and stopped him.

"You'd better answer my questions and not ask any jest now, Arizony," he said quietly. "I want tuh know where you wore that other handle, and what it was."

"Ask Carter. He can tell you."

"I reckon it'll be a heap better for you if yuh answer it yourself, Arizony."

"Well, sheriff, it was this way: I ain't ever changed my name intentionally. My right name is Simeon Marle. I'm called Sim, for short. But whenever I've happened to be in one State for long at a time, they have give me the name of that State. I've just come from Arizona and so that's what they call me. Once I happened to be mining in Nevada, and they called me after that State, then."

"Black Nevada, sheriff," said the detective quietly.

"So?" replied the sheriff. "I remember something

about that name, years ago. It belonged to a hoss-thief, sluice-robber, road-agent chap, down in Nye County, I think it was, Nevada. Is this the same feller, Carter?"

"Yes," replied Nick.

"Are yuh dead sure about it, Carter?"

"I am, sheriff."

The sheriff raised his eyes and looked from face to face throughout that crowd, remaining silent for a full minute. Then he said, very quietly:

"I reckon that evidence goes. And now I want to say to all uh yuh who are here, that I'd be right glad if them twelve gazaboos who came here with Arizony, or leastwise who are his friends, would step out and show their selves. I won't hurt 'em none, if they do; I want tuh give them a little bit uh warnin'. Are yuh comin' out, boys? No? Then listen tuh what I've got tuh say about persons buttin' in where they ain't wanted."

He glanced around him again for a moment, and then continued:

"This here trial uh the 'Kid' is going to pureeed tuh the end, and there is goin' tuh be a mighty short stiff for anybody who attempts tuh interfere with it in any way, or to force a row with anybody who happens to be connected with it, whether as a witness, or in some other way. If I so much as hear of a man even shootin' *at* a witness to that trial, he'll be meat for me; don't forget that. I hope I've made it plain enough tuh yuh all, gentlemen."

"Yuh sure have, sheriff," said a voice in reply.

"Let it go at that, then. If anybody interferes, or tries to force a quarrel with one uh the witnesses, he interferes with me, and if there is any more shootin' done in Copper's place to-night, I'll run every stranger that is here out uh the town, instanter. Are yuh all agreeable tuh that same?"

"We are," said Wallace Coburn.

"And now I'll thank yuh all to go on with your amusements, so long as they don't happen to include shootin'. And now, Arizony!"

"I'm right here, sheriff."

"Where be yuh stoppin'?"

"Right here, at this shanty, sheriff."

"Did yuh happen to fetch along any baggage with yuh, Arizony?"

"Only my hoss, and what is on him."

"And I suppose that hoss is outside in the stable, ain't he?"

"He is."

"Well, my deputies and me will ride six miles out uh town with yuh now, Arizony, if you're ready. After that, I reckon yuh can find your way alone."

"Are you going to fire me, sheriff?" asked Arizona.

"That's about the size of it. You'll have to hit the trail right smart now."

"It isn't fair, sheriff, to——"

"We won't discuss that until the next time yuh show up here, Arizony. Just now it's hit the trail for your'n, or it's a rope and a limb; which'll yuh take, Arizony?"

"I'll take the trail, sheriff. But I want you to know—and you, Nick Carter, that this won't be the last——"

"Arizony," interrupted the sheriff mildly, "my patience is gettin' mighty tired. Moreover, your voice is tiresome, too. I don't want tuh hear it ag'in. If you're ready, we'll mooch, now."

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## CHAPTER VI.

### THE RIOT IN THE COURT-HOUSE.

Just about half of the crowd that had come to attend the trial of Kid Curry were able to get inside the impromptu court-house, and as it was they packed the place until it resembled a sardine-box, well filled, more than anything else.

When Nick Carter and Wallace Coburn left their quarters in the morning, and started across the square toward the court-house, they paused as if by mutual consent, before they were half-way there, and Coburn remarked:

"I wonder if the appearance uh things strikes yuh as they do me, Nick."

"I was thinking that there are more people here than I supposed there were," replied the detective.

"And I was thinkin' the very same thing."

"It looks, Wallace, as if others had come into town during the night."

"It sure does, Nick."

"Also it suggests that maybe some of them are more friends of the 'Kid's,' don't it?"

"It sure does, Nick."

"Also suggesting that there are likely to be ugly doings before the day is over."

"Mebby so, and again mebby not. Yuh can't always tell. We don't know that this crowd intends to make a demonstration in the interest of the 'Kid'; but it does look mighty like it."

"I've been thinkin' about another thing, too, Wallace."

"What is that, Nick?"

"I have been wondering if Arizona would keep on going, after the sheriff left him to himself, six miles out of town, last night."

"I have had the same thought—*and* I don't think he would."

"What is it your idea that he would do, Wallace?"

"Why, it is my idea that some uh them gazaboes uh his'n would have trailed along after him, and they would have met up with one another somewhere out there, and fixed it up for some more uh their deviltry later on; some time tuh-day."

"I wonder what their game is?" mused the detective.

"There ain't no tellin' that, Nick."

"It doesn't seem likely that they'd dare to make an open attack, does it, with so many around here to stop them?"

"Yuh can't tell what fellers like them will do; and no more yuh can't tell what a lot uh fellers like this crowd here will do, under such circumstances, either. I tell yuh, Nick, there are a lot uh pizin'-hearted galoots around here who have secretly sympathized with the 'Kid' always, and if there was an effort made to liberate him, I don't believe they would raise a hand to interfere."

"I suppose the sheriff is onto that, isn't he?"

"Yuh bet your life he is—and some more. He won't let anything happen if he can prevent it, but it stands tuh reason that he can't be everywhere at the same time."

"Well, anyhow," said the detective, shrugging his shoulders; "there isn't anything that we can do now to ward off trouble. Let's go inside."

They moved on together toward the court-house, where one of the deputies sworn in by the sheriff made a path for them to enter.

But they had scarcely passed inside the door when there was a commotion outside, and the crowd began to surge around, forced against them by some pressure in the rear.

At the same time they could hear shouts and curses; they could hear the sharp commands of some of the deputies, and then somebody fired a gun.

It seemed to be a signal for a general mix-up, and instantly Nick realized that his own arrival at the court-house had been the agreed-upon moment for the disturbance to begin.

He and Wallace were hustled almost off their feet before they could do anything to prevent it, and it was with difficulty that they retained their upright positions at all—for the strength of a crowd, its weight, and its panic, is always a great and terrible thing to contend with.

There was another thing that impressed Nick at the same moment.

While one crowd was seemingly attempting to force its way into the court-house, a second one, that was already inside, began to attempt to force its way out—and Nick and Wallace were exactly in the center of the two contending wings.

For a moment they could do nothing.

Instinctively, they both raised their arms a little, as shields against the terrible pressure, and in doing so they naturally left their belts unguarded; and then, in spite of their efforts to the contrary, the pressure of the crowd turned them round and round, so that one moment their faces were one way and the next they were turned in a different direction.

Let him who can resist such a power of pressure as that was.

Even Nick Carter, with his great strength, found that he could not cope against it, and almost before he knew it he and Wallace were separated from each other, and were constantly drawn farther and farther apart.

It all seemed to Nick as if the moment and its results had been deliberately, as well as skilfully, planned, for he had no doubt that almost every man who was near them was a friend of the 'Kid's,' or of Arizona's, and that already other friends of those two had located themselves inside to start the rush when the signal was given.

Twenty men, or thirty, or more, pushing and shoving and yelling, from inside the building, and as many more doing the same thing from the outside was calculated to create a condition of confusion that can better be imagined than described.

Nick discovered that he was helpless, at least for a few moments. That rush against him weighed tons, and he could not hold it back; and then, when there was an instant of hiatus, and he was able to get his hands down again toward his belt, he discovered that it was gone—that it had been cut from him dexterously, while the crowd was forcing him about at its will.

No doubt the man who had done that deed believed that he had disarmed the detective. He could not have known of the small pistols that Nick always carried in his sleeves.

And now Nick found himself directly beneath the uprights of the gallery which crossed at one end of the

building. One of the stanchions was beside him, and above it he saw a projecting ornamentation, which provided him something to seize upon.

He sprang into the air and seized it, and then he raised himself upward by stepping upon the shoulders of a man who was next to him. He did it without asking permission, and he did not in the least mind the oaths that came from the man as he mounted.

But that momentary assistance enabled him to accomplish exactly what he wished to do, for with another leap upward, and using his arms to assist him, he got one foot on the projection he had seized first, and so leaped from that until he grasped upon the rail of the gallery.

He found that he was alone there, and he also instantly discovered the reason for that. The gallery had never been finished, and was only half-floored over. There were no seats there, and barely anything to stand upon, either, and there were no stairs—not even a ladder—leading to the place.

He was alone there, with the crowd surging in every direction beneath him, and it seemed as if every man there was shouting and swearing at the top of his voice.

Above the din of voices there sounded now and then a shot from the outside; as yet not one had been fired inside the building, but Nick knew that it was only a question of a moment or two when it would be done—he knew that it was only a question of accident, whether the interior of that improvised court-house was to be transformed into a slaughter-pen, or not.

Already more than one man had been crushed to the floor, and trodden upon. Already there had been cries of pain in the midst of that crowd, as well as terrible oaths of contemplated revenge.

From his point of vantage the detective could see over the heads of all of them, and he studied the different parts of the great room for a moment, in an effort to determine which were the trouble-makers, and which were law-abiding citizens.

He gave that up presently. In the fierceness of the melee, in which many were still laughing, although some were angry, he could not tell which was which.

Then his eyes sought "Kid" Curry—and found him.

The "Kid," with his hands behind him, as if they were ironed together, stood near the platform on which the judge was to sit. He was looking calmly over the crowd, as if he were more amused than interested in the sudden riot that had broken loose.

Beside him was one of the sheriff's deputies—a man named Cruger, to whom Nick had been introduced the preceding evening.

Cruger held a big "forty-four" in his right hand, and he looked as if he was ready to use it at any instant when an attempt should be made to get too close to his prisoner.

And then, almost at the moment when the detective caught sight of them, a shot rang out from somewhere near the door—it was beneath the gallery where Nick was standing—and at the same instant the deputy, Cruger, pitched forward limply to the floor, for a small, black hole had appeared suddenly, squarely in the center of his forehead.

Instantly, many other shots were fired, and an indescribable din arose in that room. Smoke filled it almost at once, and the confusion became tenfold what it had been before.

The detective saw nobody else fall, but he did see the "Kid" leap forward the moment that first shot was fired, straight toward the thickest of the crowd, and somehow he managed to hide his slender body among them so that Nick did not dare to take a snap shot at him, lest his bullet should wound another, also.

He discovered, too, in that instant, that the outlaw's hands were free, and that when he put them in front of him as he leaped into the crowd, he held two guns in them.

Then rocks were thrown in through the windows, and at others the men inside the building were smashing them in order to get outside through them.

The detective turned hastily, and looked about him.

He realized instantly that he could do nothing to recapture the "Kid" while he was inside the building, and he sought a means of escape from it for himself, in order that he might be outside when Curry got to the open.

There was only a short ladder nailed against the wall, and leading to a trap-door in the ceiling, which the detective surmised communicated with the short tower of the edifice, if such it could be called. He believed that he could gain the roof of the building by this means, and he ran toward the ladder and sprang up it with all the speed he could muster.

He came out of the trap into a small, square tower-room, where there was a bell that had never been hung so that it would ring.

The place was possibly eight feet square inside, and at

each side of it was a lattice—a frail thing only to stand in the way of the detective.

One forceful kick sent one of the lattices clattering to the roof outside, and Nick followed it instantly by leaping to the roof.

It was a shingle roof, slanting at an angle of forty-five degrees, and the instant Nick alighted upon it, he dropped to a sitting-posture, and let himself slide toward the eaves by his own weight.

And he shot from the roof into the air—into the space below him, like a projectile from a catapult, never thinking upon what sort of footing he might be destined to alight, and not considering that he might have a pair of broken legs for his trouble.

But fortune favored him, nevertheless.

It happened that the ground was soft where he struck, and although the jar was considerable, he jumped to his feet, unhurt, and dashed around the corner of the building toward the rear, intending to gain the other side, for he guessed from the position the "Kid" had occupied when he made his dash for liberty, that that was the side of the house he would make for.

He rushed around the corner at full speed, and as he turned it he collided forcibly with another body that was rushing toward him, so that both were hurled backward upon the ground.

And that other man was "Kid" Curry.

## CHAPTER VII.

### THE SHERIFF'S MIXED POSSE.

Both men were hurled backward by the impact of the blow so that they fell at some distance from each other—and both were for the instant dazed.

Curry had a gun in one hand when Nick ran into him; the detective did not, and almost before the "Kid" struck the ground, he fired at random at his enemy, for it is doubtful if he recognized Nick Carter in that instant.

Always a dead shot, his aim was not true under these circumstances; and yet his expertness did not entirely desert him, for the bullet from the pistol whizzed past the detective's ear like a honey-bee.

Both men leaped to their feet at the same instant and Nick threw his right arm forward, intending to fire one of the pistols in his sleeve.

He did shoot, too, but not quickly enough, for even as he threw his arm forward, a blow fell upon his head from behind, knocking him forward on his face and stunning him, although not entirely into unconsciousness.

Curry fired at the same instant, too, but the fall that Nick took as a result of the blow saved him from the "Kid's" bullet, as well as spared the "Kid" from his own.

And then a second blow fell upon the detective's head, even as he was trying to turn to face his foes, and he went down this time into darkness.

He did not know what happened during the next few minutes that followed, but we may as well tell it here, for he knew it later.

Two men had seen the detective leap from the roof and had rushed toward him just as he alighted and, leaping to his feet, rushed around the corner of the building.

They had followed him so closely that they were almost within reach of him all the time, and they had arrived at the scene of the collision with the "Kid" opportunely for their purposes, as we know.

When Nick fell under the second blow, the "Kid" coolly raised his pistol, and he would have put a bullet through the detective's brain then and there had it not been for the man who had struck the blow; but he knocked up the pistol and shouted:

"Don't make it any worse than it is, 'Kid'."

"I'm not going to leave that cuss here alive!" said the "Kid" savagely.

"We'll take him with us, then. Come."

As if by magic—it all showed how perfectly this delivery had been planned—three men darted out from behind the shed at that moment, each of them leading a horse, and in a moment the insensible body of the detective was thrown across the saddle of one of the animals and tied there, and the "Kid" and Arizona—for it was Arizona who had struck Nick down—leaped into the remaining saddles.

Then, while the remainder of the party rushed to cover as quickly as possible, Curry and Arizona dashed away on their horses at full speed, leading between them the animal to which Nick Carter was bound, face downward, across it.

It all happened so quickly that scarcely a moment elapsed from the time of the collision between Nick and Curry until the two outlaws were dashing away with Nick bound to a horse between them.

"What in blazes did you want tuh bring him along fer?" shouted the "Kid."

"Never mind now, 'Kid.' I'll tell you later," was the reply. "Best attend to getting away from here now.

I've got fresh horses all along the route, and I guess we can make it."

"'We'd stand a sight better chance uh doin' it if it wasn't for this cuss," growled the "Kid," digging his spurs into his horse.

"No, we wouldn't, either. We can use him as a shield all along. Hark! They have found that we have got away, 'Kid'."

"It sounds like it," admitted the other, with a grin.

"They won't catch us, and if any of them should come too close, we'll keep Carter where he will be the one who is hit, if they shoot too well. Don't you understand that?"

They rode on in silence after that, bending low in their saddles, and urging their horses to the utmost speed they could muster.

Back at the court-house there were few if any who had noticed the escape of the "Kid" through a window.

For the moment everybody had been interested in his own personal affairs, for it was as much as anybody could do to escape being crushed to death in that throng; but there was another deputy near the one who had been killed at the time it happened, and he saw the whole thing, although for the moment he had been rendered powerless to do aught to prevent it.

And as soon as he could do so he gave the alarm.

He yelled out to the others, as soon as he could make himself heard, that the "Kid" had gone through one of the windows that had been smashed in with rocks thrown from the outside, and he led the way to that window and leaped through it, followed by many others, among whom was Wallace Coburn.

They could see where the high heels of the "Kid's" boots had pressed into the soft earth when he alighted outside the window, and they quickly discovered which way he had turned.

They rushed around the corner of the building toward the rear, where the "Kid" had gone, and there came to a bare spot of earth where the collision had occurred, and where there were prints of many feet—where there were also the prints of the hoofs of three horses.

And here Wallace Coburn picked up Nick Carter's hat, and recognized it instantly.

He looked around him sharply for the body of the detective, for his first thought was that Nick had been killed; but, not seeing it, he at once came to the conclusion that they had carried Nick off with them, for he knew it would have been just what he would have done under like conditions.

In an instant the alarm was given.

Some of them rushed forward along the trail left by the horses until they passed the bushes, and then, far off, and galloping madly away from the town, they could see the two horsemen with still another horse between them which carried some sort of a burden that was bound to the saddle.

And they at once knew what that burden was. They knew it was Nick Carter.

Wallace Coburn let out a wild yell.

"They've got him! They've got him!" he cried. "I reckon they've plugged him, too, or he would never have gone with them. Horses! Horses! A hundred dollars for a horse!"

Horses were forthcoming almost at once, and dozens of men were in the saddle, giving chase within a surprisingly short space of time.

Foremost among these were Wallace and Bob Coburn, with the grim sheriff between them, riding silently, while everybody else was cursing loudly.

Back with the others came Thornhill and Black with the other two Coburns.

It was a hastily organized posse, to be sure, and there here half a hundred men stringing along the plain when it started, but as the pace grew hotter, and began to tell on some, many of them drew out, until half the original number was all that remained.

And among these were many of the strangers who had come to town to witness the trial of the "Kid."

Glancing back from time to time along the line that strung out for more than a mile, Wallace Coburn realized this and he drew over nearer to the sheriff.

"Craig," he said in a tone that only the sheriff could hear, "have you looked behind you?"

"No, I ain't. There's enough for me to look at ahead uh me, Wally."

"Well, take a look."

"What for?"

"Take a look, and maybe you'll see."

The sheriff turned his head and studied the line for a moment; and then he returned to his former position, and he said:

"I don't see nothin' particular to look at, Wallace."

"There ain't many in that bunch back there that you recognize, are there?"

"No. What of it?"

"Have you forgotten that Arizona brought a hull outfit here with him, and that this row must have been started by his bunch?"

"No. I ain't forgot it."

"Well, it's my opinion that more'n half uh that bunch that's trailing along behind us belongs tuh his outfit, and if that is so——"

He stopped significantly.

"Well, if that is so, what of it, Wallace," asked the sheriff.

"Well, they are moochin' along jest tuh make sure that we don't capture the men we are after, that's all."

"Rats!"

"And I shouldn't wonder if that is a part of their planning, too."

"Mebby so."

"It'll make trouble for some of us before we get back, sheriff."

"Ain't afraid, are yuh, Wallace?"

"Yuh know better'n tuh ask that question, Craig."

"Of course I do. I'll take it back."

"I am afraid that the 'Kid' has got a heap more followers around here than we supposed he had, Craig. And it was probably all fixed up beforehand just how this thing was to happen, too."

"There ain't any sort uh doubt uh that, Wallace."

"Even tuh the smashing of that particular window, for the 'Kid' tuh get out of; and to the presence uh the hosses behind them sheds, tuh take him away with one or two uh his men, when he did get out."

"Yes."

"And one uh them men was Arizona, I'll stake my pile."

"I think so, too."

"Well, after all that plannin', they must have known that you'd organize a posse at once and take the trail, and so they have jest fixed it that they'd have a man in your crowd who was on their side, for every one you could be sure of. Do you see that, Craig?"

"Reckon I do, Wallace."

"And mebby they've got more than one to one. Maybe they've got as many as two tuh one."

"Wallace, I don't care a hang if they've got fifteen tuh one, I'm going right ahead on this trail till I find the end of it, and I'm going to bring the 'Kid' back into camp with me, or I'm going tuh see him dead at the other end of that trail. You hear me?"

"Uh course. That all goes without saying. I knowed that afore I began tuh talk."

"Then what in blazes are yuh drivin' at?"

"I was thinkin' thet we'd better keep our eyes peeled, that's all. It wouldn't be much of an accident if, when we git close enough to begin tuh shoot—it wouldn't be much of an accident, en that case, if yuh should get a bullet in your back, Craig. That's one thing that I was thinking about."

"What was the other?"

"I was thinking that it would be a good idee, after a little, if we get the chance, to swear in a few more deputies—that we can depend on. See?"

"Yes. But where'll I find 'em? I ain't seen any skulkin' out around here. Have you?"

"No; but mebby we'll find some before we come up with the 'Kid' and Arizona. This is goin' tuh be a long chase, sheriff, an' we'll have loads uh chances to get more men before we meet up with the 'Kid'."

"I s'pose it will, Wallace."

"We've got to bring Nick Carter out uh that trouble, too. I can't for the life uh me think how he ever got into it. He went into the court-house with me, and we was separated in the crowd somehow; and then I sees him out there, between them outlaws, a prisoner, and maybe dead. I can't make it out, Craig."

## CHAPTER VIII.

### MUTINY ON THE PLAINS.

It was between eleven and twelve o'clock in the forenoon of that intensely heated day when the chase began.

The course that the two outlaws took with their prisoner between them was almost directly southeast, and it was not long before the sheriff, turning his head again toward Wallace Coburn, indicated the route ahead of them, and said:

"I'll bet yuh, Wally, I can tell yuh right now where them gazaboes is headed for."

"Reckon I can make a pretty good guess for that myself," replied Coburn.

"They're p'inting for the head of Fourchett Creek," continued the sheriff, "and it's my idee that they're going to p'int directly down that bottom to the Big Muddy; if they've planned out their escape as yuh think they have, Coburn, they'll have some kind of an outfit there at the Missouri River ready to take them across, and when

they're at the other side, they'll put directly for them four big buttes down there; Church Butte, Round Butte, and the two Piny Buttes. There ain't any wilder country in this region, Wally, than that same locality."

"Reckon you're right," came the answer.

"And, besides that, I always had the idee, Wally, that Kid Curry's real headquarters was somewhere down there."

"Strikes me," said Coburn, "he's got headquarters to burn. He's got one over near the Four Buttes, and there's that other one up yonder where Carter captured him, and now he is heading for that place, where I never knew that he hung out at all."

"No more do I know it," said the sheriff, "only I've heard more than once in the old days it was his stronghold when he had a big gang around him. That was before I came to Choteau County, yuh know."

As yet, during the chase, not a shot had been fired, although the Winchester that hung from the sheriff's saddle might easily have carried that far.

He raised the Winchester once with the idea of using it, but Coburn had called to him suddenly and sharply:

"Don't forget, sheriff, that Nick Carter's lying across that horse that's between the two outlaws, and it don't make much difference how good a marksman a man may be, it's a bit dangerous shooting at those fellows now."

"How far do yuh reckon it is from here to the Big Muddy, Wally?" the sheriff asked after a little.

"I should say it was a matter of twenty miles to the mouth of Fourchett," replied Coburn.

"Then it's easily forty or fifty more from the other side of the river to the buttes, ain't it?"

"It would be all of that and more to the Pinys."

"Do you reckon, Coburn, that they'll have relays of horses ready for them in this get-away plan of theirs?"

"If they don't, I'll be surprised."

They rode on again in silence for a considerable time after that, during which the sheriff seemed to be extremely thoughtful.

Every now and then he glanced back tentatively over his shoulder at the long line of horsemen who were trailing after him in the rear, and it was evident to Coburn that he was meditating upon what had just been said to him relative to the character of these men.

Coburn really had had no doubt of the suspicions he had voiced, for he too had looked frequently over his shoulder and discovered, as his gaze wandered from man to man in the rear of them, that fully two-thirds of the party, which had now dwindled to about thirty men, were unknown to him.

They had been riding at top speed for something more than an hour, when the outlaws with their captive disappeared suddenly over a rise of ground and their pursuers knew that they had ridden down the bank toward the bed of Fourchett Creek.

A little bit farther along and just before they came to this rise of ground they were neither of them surprised to find three horses, from which the saddles and bridles had been removed, cropping the grass where they had been abandoned by the fugitives, and thus they were made certain that the first relay which had been provided for the use of the outlaws had been overtaken and passed.

They wondered who the men might be who had brought the extra horses there, but as there was no one in sight it became evident to them that the animals had simply been tethered at that spot to await them.

And now the topography of the ground over which they were traveling was such that the fleeing outlaws were out of sight most of the time, and presently it became certain to the sheriff and to Wallace Coburn that the fresh horses were doing what had been expected of them, and that the sheriff and his posse were surely being outdistanced.

They kept doggedly on, however, for another half-hour before the sheriff pulled his horse to a stop and called to Wallace Coburn to do the same.

"I reckon, Wally," he said, with his nasal drawl, "that we'd better pull up here for a few minutes, and give our horses a breathing-spell. It's a right smart pace we've been a-going at, and if we don't save our animals a little bit they'll give out before we get to the Muddy; and besides, Wally, I reckon it's about time I had a little discussion with that outfit that's behind us."

The two men got down from their saddles, permitting their horses to nibble the grass while they waited; and as the men who were with them came up one by one, they signaled for them to do the same.

Wallace, who had drawn the sheriff off a little to one side, waited until the entire number—and they counted thirty-two—were gathered around the spot, when he said in a low tone to his companion:

"Sheriff, I've been thinking about this situation we're in."

"Well, what about it?"

"I've been thinking it might be a good idea to weed 'em out a little bit."

"I've been turning over the same idee in my own mind," said the sheriff.

"I've been a-counting them fellers," said Coburn.

"So've I, Wally."

"I make it there's about eleven of them there, sheriff, that we can sure depend on."

"That's what I made it, too."

"And I was thinking," continued Coburn, as if he were meditating deeply upon the subject, "that mebbe it wouldn't be a bad idea for yuh if yuh'd just say out in meeting that you don't want so many men along with yuh; if yuh'd just say that about ten or twelve, or mebbe fourteen of 'em, would do, and send the rest of 'em back about their business."

The sheriff nodded his head emphatically.

"That's just what I've determined to do, Wally," he said, "but all the same I'd put it down in my mind that when I attempt to fire the ones I don't want, they'll refuse to go."

Coburn shrugged his shoulders.

"Well, he said, "it's my private opinion that if we've got to have it out with 'em some time or other, we might as well have it now and have it over with; anyhow, the time has come when yuh've got to speak your piece. I'll sit mighty still in the saddle alongside of yuh, but yuh can bank on it, sheriff, that I'll be ready for any emergency that chances to arise."

The horsemen who made up the posse were now grouped around the sheriff and Coburn in such a manner that they would have surrounded them entirely had not Coburn, with an eye to possible developments, kept drawing the sheriff back step by step and so avoided it. He knew how dangerous it would be, if there should be any row with some of these men, to have any of them behind him and the sheriff when it began.

Some of them had dismounted and were permitting their horses to feed as the sheriff had done, but others, almost half the entire number, remained in their saddles while they waited to hear what the sheriff had to say; and Coburn noticed that without an exception every one who so remained belonged to that portion of the outfit who were unknown to him.

"Boys," the sheriff began, when he was assured that he had their attention, "this is about the quickest-organized posse that I ever took out on the trail. Don't you think so?"

There were a few grunts of assent.

"I've been thinking, while we've been moochin' along here in pursuit of them varmints ahead of us, that there wan't no sort uh use uh my keeping all of yuh along with me, just as there's no sort uh use for us to keep on hurrying the way we've been doing; because, you see, boys, we've got to the first relay of horses them outlaws had outfitted and just now they're riding away from us just as easy as rolling down hill.

"Now, Wally Coburn and me have been putting our heads together as we rode along and we've about made up our minds where them gazaboes are headed for, and anyhow, if we ain't right about that, they're leaving a plain enough trail behind 'em for us to follow, so I'm going to pick out about ten out of this bunch and swear them in right here and now, and when I've done that the rest of ye can mooch back to town just as quick as ye want."

One of the men who was seated on his horse, a tall, dark-skinned, ugly-faced fellow he was, too, grinned insolently across the space between him and the sheriff and answered:

"It strikes me, sheriff, you'll need us all before yuh get through."

"Does it?" asked the sheriff calmly. "It strikes me I'm the best judge of that."

"I ain't saying nothing about what kind of a judge yuh are, but it don't change my opinion none; I think yuh'll need us all."

"Mebbe what you think don't cut much ice here," said the sheriff coldly, "and I reckon it don't. Who are you, anyhow, and what may yer name be? Strikes me I don't happen to know yuh."

"I guess I ain't the only one in this bunch you don't know, sheriff."

"Well, now," drawled the sheriff, "that's about so; I guess you ain't, and yuh might as well put it down right now that I'm going to pick the ones I want, and so now I'll proceed to do the picking."

He began at once calling off, starting with Wallace Coburn and adding to it the announcement that Wallace was to be chief deputy, and then one by one he named over the eleven men present who were known to him, asking them as he did so to step off to one side, so that by the time he had finished the enumeration the party was divided with twelve men on one side, counting Coburn, and twenty-one men on the other side standing or sitting

their horses at a distance of about thirty feet from each other, while exactly in the center between them stood the sheriff.

His own men, that is, those whom he had selected and whom he could trust, were directly behind him as he faced the others, and now he said coolly to them:

"That'll be about all I want, my friends, and the rest of yuh can go back to town and wait there until we return with our prisoners."

"Mebbe we don't want to," said the man who had done the talking before. "S'posen we don't, what then?"

"It don't make no difference, stranger, what you want to do. It's what I want yuh to do. I'm the sheriff of this here county, and I want yuh to know that I'm going to come pretty near to running it as long as I hold this office. Now, you fellers, every last one of yuh, about face and hit the trail."

The man who had spoken before grinned insolently into the face of the sheriff and replied, as coolly as that official had spoken:

"We ain't going, sheriff, till we get good and ready, and you can put that in your pipe and smoke it."

## CHAPTER IX.

### THE PRISONER ON HORSEBACK.

For a moment after that remarkable assertion the man who made it and the sheriff to whom it had been addressed remained as still as statues, glaring into each other's eyes, the sheriff's glance being coolly self-possessed and scornful, while there was a leer of insolent triumph on the face of the other man, for no doubt he figured with the numbers behind him he could defy the sheriff with impunity.

For a moment they stared at each other without moving, and then as quick as the tongue of a toad the sheriff moved his wrist ever so little and pulled the trigger of the gun he carried in his right hand.

It was a quick snap shot, entirely unexpected by the man at whom it was aimed, or by any of them who were present, in fact, and the bullet went true to the spot where the sheriff intended it should go.

It struck the man who had dared to defy him in the right arm just above the elbow, shattering the bone and knocking the man off his horse with the shock of it.

Coburn was, perhaps, the only man in that outfit who was not surprised by this incident, but he knew the sheriff better than any one else in that crowd, and knew what he was capable of doing in an emergency.

Coburn had also utilized the opportunity, while the sheriff was making his short speech, to pass the word along from ear to ear among the men who had gathered on his side of the division, explaining just what the present attitude of the sheriff meant, with the result that when the sheriff did break the arm of the man who defied him, the eleven who were lined up with Coburn had their guns out and in position instantly.

The man who was shot yelled out with rage and pain as he fell from his horse to the ground; but he picked himself up with surprising alacrity and was reaching for his gun with his left hand when the sheriff covered him deliberately.

"I won't aim for your arm next time, my dicky bird," he said, with cool emphasis. "You just put that good hand of yours in the air and keep it there till I tell you to lower it."

Every man in that party of twenty-one had reached for and many had succeeded in pulling their guns already, and for a few minutes succeeding the occurrence of the shooting the situation looked extremely ominous for all who were concerned in it. If it came to a clash between the two parties, it was safe to say that very few of them would leave that spot alive, and it was highly improbable that any of those would belong to the sheriff's party, which was so greatly outnumbered.

There were fully a dozen guns leveled at the sheriff himself as he stood there on the ground, calmly contemptuous, facing them, and while they hesitated a deathlike silence reigned over them all, fraught, as it was, with such terrible possibilities. The sheriff addressed them, speaking as coolly as he had done before:

"I ain't a-saying, boys, that some of you ain't on the level; I ain't a-saying, fellers, that all of you are in sympathy with Kid Curry and that Arizony tin-horn gambler who has gone away with him; I ain't in fact, a-saying that any of you are, with the possible exception of that raw-boned cuss that's got a broken arm for his insolence, but what I am saying is this, and I want you to listen to it."

"You better be careful that you don't say too much, Mister Sheriff," grumbled one of them.

"I'll say what I have to say, Mister Man, even if there was three times as many of you fellers lined up over there, and, as I said a minute ago, it's this: I know mighty

well that you outnumber us about two to one and I know mighty well if it comes to a show-down that there won't be many of us left at this end to ride back to town, if they ride anywhere, but I want to tell you that when you tackle the present sheriff of Choteau County, you're up against it mighty hard, and what few of you might be left alive after the row is over will be hunted down like so many wolves and strung up like so many horse-thieves by my friends, who are scattered from top to bottom and from end to end of this here county. Now, you just take my advice and don't pull a trigger. Wheel your horses around and start, while me and my friends are here to see you go, 'cause it's that or fight; now, choose!"

It is always remarkable what the daring of one cool and determined man can accomplish in the face of almost overwhelming opposition.

Those men who sat there on their horses scowling sullenly at the sheriff, and nervously fingering their guns as they did so, were doubtless all of them men who had faced death many times. It is doubtful if there was one in that party who was really afraid; who would have hesitated, if some one had precipitated the fight, to go into it with all earnestness.

But the cool assurance of the sheriff won the day, for it was the man whom he had already wounded who called out to them:

"Come on, boys; I guess there's another way of getting square with him instead of having it out now."

The others turned at that; at first slowly, and then more rapidly, and in a moment more they were cantering their horses back over the trail toward the town, while the sheriff and Coburn and the men who had been selected to remain with them watched their going in utter silence.

At the top of a rise thirty rods distant, the wounded man stopped his horse, and, turning in his saddle shouted:

"Go on, curse you! But I'll tell you now, sheriff, that if you follow Kid Curry to where he's going, there ain't any of you in that bunch that will ever come back again!"

With that threat he followed the others, while the sheriff called to his own men to fall in, and once more started down the creek on the trail of the fleeing outlaws.

But this stop, short as it had been, had given the "Kid" and his companion, now mounted on fresh horses, a splendid chance of increasing the distance between them and their pursuers, so it was only at long intervals that the sheriff and his men caught a glimpse of them.

Once again, in the middle of the afternoon, they came to a place where horses had been exchanged a second time, and it was at once evident to all of them that they could not hope to overtake the outlaws at all. The only thing they could hope to do was to follow doggedly on the trail and ultimately hope to corner them somewhere among the mountains for which they were making.

All of this time, of course, they had reckoned without taking into consideration the possible activity of Nick Carter himself, who had been so unfortunately captured and was now being carried away by the outlaws.

It will be remembered that Nick had received two blows, one after the other, on the back of his head before he was thrown face downward across the saddle on the horse's back and tied there with a lariat, which had been looped around his wrists and ankles under the horse's belly.

But Nick did not remain long unconscious.

In the first place, he had not been severely injured, for the thickness of the hat he had worn had been between his head and the blows, so that the effect of them had been only to stun him.

Very soon after they started on their wild run across the plain from the southeast, the terrific jolting which Nick was subjected to on account of his position brought him out of the coma and he became perfectly conscious of everything that was happening around him.

The two men who rode beside him, one on either side, paid very little, if any, attention to him.

From time to time they glanced in his direction, it is true, but it evidently did not occur to either of them that he had recovered his senses, and certainly they did not suppose that he would be able to help himself in any way if he should.

When consciousness did return to the detective, his first effort was to do what he could to make himself more comfortable. If the reader will take some opportunity of lying across a horse in the position Nick Carter was in at that moment, and then have the horse started forward on a gallop, he will realize something of the terrific jolting that was the detective's portion during this wild ride; but Nick managed to get his thumbs inside the cinch, and thus was enabled to partially support himself for a time and to somewhat relieve his suffering.

Very little care had been used by the outlaws in tying him on the horse, for the reason that there had been no time to exercise it, for when he was captured the outlaws had to get away at once from the vicinity or be caught, and it would have been a short matter for either of them

had they been overtaken at that time; there would have been no further need for a trial at law.

And so it happened that as Nick was stretched across the saddle his face and hands were on the side where the horse had been cinched, and it was not long before the detective discovered that the rope with which he was fastened there was not pulled so tightly as the outlaw had intended it to be.

Again, it must not be forgotten that the day was a hot one and that the speed to which the horses were urged heated them so that the moisture from their bodies caused the lariat to stretch perceptibly, and thus it was that by straining with all his strength that the detective was enabled at last to loosen the bonds that held him so that he could keep himself comfortable, considering what the conditions had been at first.

He strove with all his strength to stretch it still further in order to reach the place where the cinch had been fastened, but he was obliged to desist at last, realizing that it was impossible to do so.

He had taken great care not to permit the outlaws to suspect that consciousness had returned to him, and after a little he heard them talking about the expected change of horses, which was soon to occur.

When the time came to make the change, near the head of Fourchett Creek, Nick still pretended unconsciousness, and it was well that neither of the men suspected him, although when they lifted him from the horse he thought seriously of utilizing the opportunity that this proceeding afforded to attack them both and trust to his own strength to overcome them.

But he was stiff and sore from the effects of his experience, and he had already determined upon another method of procedure.

Nick knew from the conversation he had overheard that the chase was hot upon the outlaws, and that therefore the change of horses would be made as expeditiously as possible.

Accordingly, still feigning unconsciousness, he permitted them to lift him from one horse to the other and again to fasten him as they had done before; but this time he managed to draw in his arms and legs considerably, so that when the knots were tied and the outlaws' backs were turned, and they were again speeding onward on the backs of fresh horses, he was afforded considerable more play of rope than he had been before.

But even this did not prove sufficient for his purpose, for still he was unable to reach that part of the cinch with his hands which would have enabled him to free himself from the bonds that held him.

And so they arrived at the place where the second change was made.

Here some surprise was expressed by the two outlaws at the continued unconsciousness of the detective, Arizona going so far as to put his ear against the detective's chest and listen for his heart-beats.

"He's alive, all right," he said then.

"He'd be a heap sight better off if he was dead," growled the "Kid." "What's the matter with putting a bullet through him now and leaving him here, eh?"

"No," Arizona answered, "I've got an old ax to grind with this chap, and I've got a special reason for taking him with us where we're going, and you'll find out when we get there."

And so Nick was bound to the third horse, but this time he was enabled to effect a little bit of strategy which was to be of service to him later. He had managed, when the backs of both outlaws had been turned to him during the moment that followed their discussion concerning him, to thrust a hand into one of his pockets and secure his penknife, open the blade, and to jab it in this way through a buttonhole in his vest, where he knew he would be able later to reach it with his teeth in case the outlaws did not discover it while they were binding him on the horse.

But they did not, for, believing him to be still unconscious, they paid very little attention more than to throw him across the horse roughly and tie him as they had done before; and now when they started on again Nick reached down for the handle of the penknife with his teeth and finally succeeded in getting hold of it and then by careful and persistent effort and watching his chances when the horses were brought to a walk for a moment, in such a way that he dropped it directly into the palm of his right hand, which he had managed to turn upward.

The fact that the point pierced his flesh and the edge of the blade, cut him somewhat was unimportant, considering the fact that he had managed to seize upon the knife and hold it.

It will be remembered that the noose of the lariat had been pulled tightly around his wrists after placing them together, and so he was able to turn his hands somewhat by straining them considerably underneath the rawhide thong.

And now, with knife in his grasp, he succeeded in turning it about until, by sheer determination of will

added to strength of muscle, he forced the blade's edge outward beneath the rawhide lariat that held him in his uncomfortable position.

In another instant he had severed it so that he was now lying across the saddle, no longer fastened to it.

## CHAPTER X.

### NICK CARTER TURNS A TRICK OF HIS OWN.

The outlaws knew when they started on after this last change of horses that they had left pursuit far behind them. Nick heard them say as much to each other, and the consequence was that they went forward with much less speed than before.

The course of Fourchett Creek had now descended deeper between its banks, so they were riding along through what was almost a coulée, or ravine, and Nick knew that the Missouri River could not be far away.

Neither was night far distant, and by the time they came in sight of the big river the sun had set and it was almost dark.

The outlaws now walked their horses a portion of the time, for the ride had been a long and tiresome one, and although they stopped several times to listen, they could hear no sound of pursuing hoof-beats.

Nick, since he had cut the lariat that held him, had managed to make himself considerably more comfortable, and from time to time, when he was certain that the others were not looking, to rest one part of his body and then the other, for his own horse always lagged a little behind the others, and the outlaws were no longer particular to keep him between them.

He had not been able, owing to his position on the horse, to know anything about the direction they had taken since the flight began, his only knowledge on that point being derived from remarks that were made between the outlaws as they rode onward; nevertheless, he was made aware of it when they were approaching the big river, and at last they rode down a somewhat steeper slope than the others and came full upon it just at the moment when the twilight deepened into night. He heard an exclamation of annoyance made by Arizona, and it was due to the fact that a raft, which they had expected to find at that point awaiting them, was not there.

Arizona cursed every one of the men under him vehemently, as did Kid Curry; but it was the latter who presently suggested to his companion that the men who had been instructed to leave the raft there for them might have mistaken the exact spot where they were to do so, for the reason, as he explained, that there were two creeks which emptied into the Missouri right here within less than a quarter of a mile of each other, one of which bore the euphonious title of Killed Woman Creek.

"It's more than likely," he said to Arizona, "that being strangers in these parts, that they have left the raft up there at the mouth of Killed Woman instead of here at Fourchett. You wait here with the horses and this prisoner you think so much of while I go and find out."

He left at once, and while Arizona stood watching his departure his back was turned toward Nick Carter, who saw in this event the opportunity he had longed for ever since their start upon the wild ride.

The detective had not yet been taken from the back of the horse, and it was supposed, of course, by Arizona that he was still tightly bound to it, and therefore the gambler-outlaw probably did not regard it as necessary that he should keep a watchful eye upon his captive.

Nick's position during this moment of suspense was such that he could see Arizona's back quite plainly as it was presented to him, and he decided to act at once, taking chances of making no noise to warn the "Kid" of what was happening.

With a light leap he sprang from his horse to the ground, and the moment his feet touched upon it he turned and threw himself bodily toward Arizona, who was not more than three yards distant from him.

Something, a motion of the horse or the noise of the detective, necessarily made in alighting from its back, startled the gambler so that he attempted to turn just as Nick attacked him.

For just one instant he was so astounded by what he saw that he was prevented from doing anything to save himself, and it was therefore that instant which gave Nick Carter the victory in the fierce but short struggle that followed.

Nick, of course, was stiff and sore from the effects of his ride, but nevertheless he was thoroughly aroused and entirely aware of the fact that this was the only opportunity that would be likely to come to him to make an effort to obtain his freedom, for he did not doubt that if the outlaws once succeeded in getting him to the place where they wanted to take him, he would never be permitted to escape from it alive.

It has been intimated elsewhere in this history that although the gambler was slight of build, he was no

weakling, and Nick discovered that to be true when they grappled with each other.

The gambler started to call for help to his companion, who had left him, but Nick's right hand had already closed around his throat and the exclamation was shut off before it could be uttered.

And then for a moment they swayed from side to side until, with a great effort, the detective succeeded in obtaining the hold he wanted, and that done, he lifted the gambler high in the air and dashed him down with all his strength upon the shingly beach where they were struggling.

Arizona's head struck a stone and he stiffened out with a shuddering gasp and lay quite still, unconscious or dead, the detective did not know which and cared less.

For just a moment following upon this outcome of the struggle the detective stood there silently regarding the man he had just overcome, and then working rapidly he leaned forward and quickly deprived him of his weapons.

His next act was to make use of the lariat which had so lately held him securely upon the saddle, and with it he bound Arizona hand and foot and then, fully equipped for any conflict which might ensue, he seated himself in the shadow of the bank to await the return of Kid Curry.

His plan was to take the "Kid" entirely by surprise when he returned, and in order to accomplish this the more thoroughly he laid the unconscious figure of the gambler across the horse before he placed himself in the shadows to wait.

But the "Kid" did not return.

Many minutes passed without any sign of his approach, and the detective began to wonder, just as Arizona himself might have wondered, had he been in a conscious condition to do so.

It was certain that the "Kid" had been gone from the spot long enough to have covered the distance to the mouth of Killed Woman Creek and back two or three times before Nick began to regard it as strange that he did not reappear.

But when he did not do so, and when more than half an hour had passed without any sign of him at all, the detective decided that one of two things had happened: either Curry had deliberately deserted the man who had done so much to liberate him from prison and save him from death at the end of a rope, or some accident had happened to detain him. He might have fallen into a washout along the shore of the river; he might have stepped upon a snake which had bitten him, or some accident which could not be explained had rendered him for the moment helpless.

The detective allowed the time to lengthen to three-quarters of an hour before he decided on going after the "Kid" instead of waiting for the outlaw to return to him, and then, looking to it that the horses were well secured, and that Arizona would not be able to make his escape during his absence, he started out himself in the direction the "Kid" had taken in search of that daring outlaw.

In due time he came to the mouth of Killed Woman Creek, which at this season of the year, even though close to the big river, was almost dry, and there he paused and listened, peering through the starlight as best he could for some indication of the presence of the outlaw. Nothing of him could be seen, however, and so the detective moved forward a little and presently on the shore of the river itself he discovered marks in the sand where a dugout canoe had been dragged into the water.

Instantly it rushed upon him that the raft they had expected to find had not been placed there, but that the "Kid" had discovered a dugout which was capable of holding only one passenger, and, always thinking of himself, he had, without a miment's thought or a second's hesitation, deserted his companion and made good his own escape.

And then, as the detective raised his eyes, he could see floating upon the surface of the water more than half-way across it already, a black blot which he had no doubt was the dugout containing Kid Curry.

With reckless humor he raised one of the pistols he had taken from Arizona and fired at the black blotch upon the water, which was already practically out of range, but an answering flash and report from the man in the dugout assured him that his conjecture had been correct.

## CHAPTER XI.

### SOME SHOTS IN THE DARK.

Returning to the mouth of Fourchett, where he had left Arizona, Nick knew that it was only necessary for him to make himself as comfortable as possible and to wait where he was for the arrival of the pursuers who were already on the trail of the escaping outlaws, but he considered it safer to move away from that immediate spot, and so mounting one of the horses he led the other two, with Arizona tied firmly across the back of one of

them, up the trail by the way they had come for upward of a mile, until he discovered a spring of cold water near which he determined to make his camp, and half an hour later he was sleeping the sleep of the just with no thought in his mind that Kid Curry might return again before daylight.

He had not slept very long when he was roused suddenly by the restless motions of one of the horses, and he raised himself on his elbow to listen and to consider what it was that had disturbed the creature. He could hear nothing. The fire he had lighted when he first made camp had died away to a mass of glowing embers which now afforded no light at all beyond a small circle which was immediately around it. But the detective hastened to withdraw himself even farther away from this, for now for the first time he thought upon the possibility of Kid Curry's return.

He remembered that the two outlaws had expected to find a raft waiting for them there at the river, which would convey their horses as well as themselves across it to the other side, and now Nick thought possibly that the "Kid" might have know where one was to be found on the other side of the river, and might have gone after it in the dugout, intending all the time to return for his companion, and without having once any thought of deserting him.

As Nick drew farther back from the glow of the fire, the horse became even more restless, and presently neighed, and then Nick heard a voice that was unmistakably Kid Curry's call out from the darkness below him:

"Arizona! Where the devil are you?"

And to the detective's utter surprise, for momentarily he had forgotten all about Arizona himself, the gambler, to whom consciousness had returned, replied instantly:

"I'm here, you fool, and I'm a prisoner, too; Carter got loose and he's laying for you. Look out!"

The instant that Nick heard the sound of Arizona's voice in reply to Curry's question, he raised one of the pistols and fired through the darkness at the point where Kid Curry's voice had proceeded from, and the moment he pulled the trigger he jumped as far as he could to the right and threw himself flat upon the ground, for he knew that Curry would send a bullet back again the instant he saw the flash.

And he did it, too; but owing to the detective's thoughtfulness in jumping out of the way it did not do any harm.

He also fired a second time; this time at the flash he had seen of Curry's weapon, again jumping out of the way the instant he shot and again avoiding a second bullet fired by the outlaw.

And this sort of game of hide-and-seek was kept up until each of them had fired five shots through the darkness toward the other, although it is certain that not one of the ten bullets had any effect whatever.

After that they were both silent, and Nick waited for a long time with eyes and ears keenly on the alert, hoping that the impatience of the outlaw would be such that he would do something to betray his location, but if the detective was keenly upon the alert, so was the outlaw, for each waited for the other to make some sign of his presence toward which a bullet might be sped. The detective had no idea what time it was, for he had been sleeping soundly when the horses woke him, and knew not how many hours might have passed, but by studying the stars from time to time he decided that the night was well advanced and that it would not be very long before dawn would begin to show itself.

He had left Arizona bound hand and foot, to be sure, but not gagged, and lying within the circle of light around the fire, but now the glow had died out so much that the form of the gambler looked more like a log than anything else that was lying there.

Nick had no doubt that with the approach of daylight Kid Curry would think it wise to depart again and once more to cross the river in his flight, for he would realize before that time that even if he might not succeed in rescuing Arizona from the hands of the detective, he could at least make his own escape while he had the means of doing so at the river's edge.

So Nick determined, if it were possible, to get between the outlaw chief and the river, and accordingly selecting his way with great care and lying flat upon the ground, he wormed his way along, Indian fashion, higher up on the bank and then down and alongside of it, hoping thereby to pass around the "Kid" and to get behind him.

He argued to himself that if he could do that he would be in a position where he could not only head off the outlaw if he tried to escape, but it might be possible for him to find the raft itself and set it adrift, thus cutting off his means of departure entirely.

As he crept forward along the bank just under the top of it and into the densest shadow he could find, he stopped every few minutes and remained motionless for a time while he listened intently for some sign of the "Kid"; and

then he moved onward again in the same cautious manner as before.

This method of procedure must have continued for almost an hour, when in starting forward after one of these waits that has been described, in reaching out his hand, he touched upon a soft object directly ahead of him and at the same instant felt the touch of a hand upon his own person.

By a strange coincidence the outlaw and the detective had had the same idea and had worked upon it in the same manner, using the same methods and each had pursued exactly the same course, selecting that point of dense blackness which was just beneath the edge of the bank.

And so they had crawled forward, each trying to get behind the other the better to continue the attack, until they met face to face, or rather head to head in the darkness.

The astonishment was mutual.

There was one extremely short interval, during which neither of them moved an inch, and then there came a flash of a pistol almost in the face of the detective and so close that he felt the heat of it and the sting of the powder against his face, while the bullet whizzed through the detective's hair so close to the top of his skull that it grazed it in its flight.

But with the firing of that shot the "Kid," who had no thought or desire for a hand-to-hand encounter with Nick Carter, started to his feet and ran like a hare down the coulée through the darkness in his efforts to escape.

The detective paused just long enough to send one shot after him before he started in pursuit, and then he took up the chase, running rapidly after the escaping man.

But the darkness was so intense that not a thing could be seen, save that now and then as he ran the "Kid" half-turned twice sufficiently to send a bullet back each time toward the detective, who was pursuing him.

But the detective had stopped shooting now.

He believed that he could overtake and capture the outlaw, and that was what he wanted to do above all others. To take him back to the court-house from which he had escaped, and compel him, notwithstanding all that had happened, to be tried for his life, was exactly what the detective desired; and now that he had succeeded in driving him away from the vicinity of the spot where Arizona was lying bound and helpless and was so closely pursuing him that the "Kid" could not hope to reach his boat or raft in time to put it adrift and escape by means of it, Nick had great hopes that this desire of his would be fulfilled.

And so they covered the short distance to the shore of the river.

As Nick dashed out upon the shingle toward the edge of the water he saw dimly for one moment directly ahead of him the outline of Kid Curry's fleeing figure against the water, but even as he discovered it and the thought came to him that it might be well to put a bullet through the outlaw's leg and so stop him, the man disappeared utterly, just as if he had dropped into some hole in the ground or had suddenly been whisked away beyond sight or sound.

The detective stopped, gazing ahead of him intently.

There was a clear view now directly in front of him down to the water's edge, and a moment before the "Kid" had been directly in the middle of it, but now he had disappeared entirely from view.

## CHAPTER XII.

### NICK CARTER SWIMS TO VICTORY.

Realizing what an excellent target he would make if he stepped out farther into the light that was reflected from the stars by the river, the detective hesitated for some moments before he decided how to act in this emergency.

There were two things that he wished to do, and like many others who have been confronted by an emergency, he wished he might do them both at once.

He wished to set that raft adrift, and he wanted to return and guard Arizona, so that the "Kid" would not be able to set him free and possibly to arm him with a spare revolver.

He looked about him on either side and decided that Curry could not get back up the bed of the creek or along either side of it without passing in view of him and that his only way to get within reach of Arizona would be to pass around the top of one bank or the other.

It was the disappearance itself which puzzled the detective, for he could not understand it.

He remembered—rather indistinctly, of course—something about the condition of that waterway between the banks, and he could not recall that he had seen any hole there that was of sufficient depth for a man to hide himself in it.

He did not believe that there was one.

He waited a long time where he stood, and then, deci-

ding that he was accomplishing nothing by hesitating longer, and believing that he must risk something if he would succeed in what he had undertaken, he dropped again upon his face, Indian-fashion, and began to squirm his way along with all the silence and caution that he could command.

And so he covered the entire distance between the point where he had stopped and the edge of the water where the huge raft, fashioned of dry and seasoned sycamore, was moored to the shore.

During the entire distance he had expected at any instant to feel the impact of a bullet against his person, or at least to know that one had been fired at him, but not a sound had disturbed the silence of the night save that of his own breathing; Kid Curry had made no sign whatever of his presence near there.

The raft was fastened to the shore by a stout rope, to the end of which a heavy stone had been attached, and this stone had been carried ashore and left there when he had made his landing. Now, Nick, discovering it, merely cut the rope and tossed the remainder of it across the raft and pushed it off into the water, then with an additional shove sent it plowing onward into the current of the mighty river.

He did not rise to his feet.

That would have been too dangerous an act, but the moment the raft was free from the shore and he was satisfied that it was beyond the reach of the outlaws, he flattened himself upon the ground and started again upon the back trail, determined now to make his way again directly to the place where he had left Arizona.

Still with a feeling prominently in his thoughts that there was some hole or hiding-place in which the "Kid" had dived momentarily to conceal himself, Nick took a zigzag course upon his return, studying the ground as he went.

But he discovered nothing at all. Whatever the "Kid" had done, he had managed to efface himself, and, still slightly puzzled, the detective continued on his way, at last arriving in sight of the heap of glowing coals where his fire had been burning.

He paused before he approached it, for if the "Kid" had returned that way Nick had no doubt that he was lying in wait somewhere in the darkness for the purpose of shooting the detective the moment he should appear, but although he waited some time he saw no evidence of Curry's presence, and at last, having studied the ground in the vicinity of the fire quite thoroughly, he became convinced that the loglike appearance that had been made by Arizona's body that had been beside it, was no longer there.

Perceiving this and convinced of it, he started forward impetuously, with no thought at the instant of the possibility of being shot, but determined to make sure whether Arizona had escaped or not. As he approached nearer, a second glance told him that he had made no mistake. Arizona was gone; and then the detective knew that somehow the "Kid" had managed to avoid him near the mouth of the coulée, had got past him and returned; had liberated his friend and had probably armed him, so that now the detective had to contend with two instead of one.

It can be imagined that he lost no time in leaping backward through the darkness until he was well out of sight of anybody, and then he approached on hands and knees the spot where he had left the horses and where he could hear them occasionally stamping their feet.

He was amazed when he reached them to find they had not been disturbed, for he thought that the "Kid" would have taken them had he only thought about it, but then he smiled grimly to himself, recalling the raft that he had cast adrift, and he had no doubt that the outlaw believed that he might still secure it and so cross the river to the other side. And now for a moment he was again undecided between two courses to pursue, one of which was to return again to the river's edge, thus abandoning the horses if the "Kid" should decide to return for them, and the other was to remain by them in hiding in the hope that the outlaw would come back that way to secure them.

He selected the latter course, and finally picking out a place where he could remain concealed while he was afforded as good a view himself as the darkness would permit, he seated himself, calmly determined to wait the coming of daylight without again moving from his position.

The hour that intervened between that time and dawn seemed almost endless to the detective, but at last the shadows began to grow less deep and the sky brightened visibly, while the stars became paler and paler as dawn advanced. As soon as it became light enough to see distinctly for any distance, the detective left the spot where he had been seated, and all the while peering cautiously ahead of him and from side to side, once more slowly descended along the bed of the creek to the river.

He didn't care now if the outlaws should make an attempt to secure the horses, for he hadn't a doubt that the

posse from town, which he knew was in pursuit, would arrive there very soon and it would then be only a question of time before the "Kid" and Arizona would be overtaken.

He arrived within sight of the edge of the river and glanced downward toward it, where the raft had been moored and where he had set it adrift again, and then in the soft clay at the edge of the water he discovered fresh footprints.

They were directly at the point where the raft would have covered them at the time it was on the shore, and accordingly the detective was certain they had been made since the time when he pushed it adrift, and therefore he knew that Kid Curry and Arizona had come that way very lately.

For an instant he studied the tracks intently; he saw and was amazed that each separate track made by two different men pointed outward with their toes toward the river, and that there were no returning marks.

Suddenly aware of what had happened and instantly understanding the situation with which he was now confronted, he raised his eyes quickly and looked out across the surface of the water, and then he smiled broadly, for scarcely two hundred yards away from the shore, bobbing up and down in the wavelets, each with an arm thrown across a small timber to help float him, were the two outlaws he was after. Swimming with all their strength and with all the swiftness they could summon in their mad efforts to escape the grasp of the law.

And at the same instant he discovered them the detective heard the clatter of horses' hoofs up the coulée and saw the sheriff and Wallace Coburn dash into view.

But the detective had thrown off his coat and waistcoat and was casting aside his shoes, and now, as the two men leaped from their horses to the ground, he called out to them:

"Follow me, if you care to. I'm going to bring one at least of these fellows back here!" and he leaped into the river.

Always a strong swimmer, Nick Carter outdid himself on this occasion. He swam with the long overhand reach which is called the "sailor's stroke," and he gained upon the fugitives so swiftly, each of whom was endeavoring to drag a timber along with him in his flight, so that it seemed almost as if they were motionless upon the water.

Curry was considerably in advance of Arizona, and so it was the latter who was overtaken first, and the detective never in his life saw such a frightened countenance as was turned appealingly toward him, and instantly he came to the conclusion that Arizona could not swim and was only depending upon the log for support while he paddled to the other side.

Nick laughed in his face and then called out to him:

"You turn back, Arizona, and swim back to the shore you just left; if you don't, I'll take that log away from you and let you drown!" and then perceiving that the sheriff was already in the water and also swimming toward them, he made on rapidly for the "Kid."

In less than a hundred yards more he overtook him and as he did he called out:

"Curry, you turn about and swim the other way, or I'll drown you!"

"Drown and be hanged!" was the savage reply, and Curry drew a pistol which he had kept in his belt and aimed it pointblank at the detective and pulled the trigger.

The cartridge, however, did not explode, and Nick laughed in his face.

Then, reaching for his own revolver and holding it high out of the water, he said:

"I'll show you, 'Kid,' that my cartridges are better than yours. I'll shoot one of them into the air just to prove it to you, and then if you don't turn about and swim in the other direction I'll plug you in the shoulder with the next one."

He fired the weapon as he said he would do, and then, having swum around until he was in front of the escaping outlaw, he waited while he aimed the pistol at the "Kid" and said:

"Will you take the bullet, or will you go back?"

"I'll go back," said the "Kid," and he turned around.

We have only to add that the "Kid" did return to the shore from which he had escaped, and also Arizona, and that by sundown that day they occupied cells side by side adjoining the court-house where the "Kid" was to have been tried for his life thirty hours earlier.

And it is only necessary to add that their trial was resumed the following day without disturbance, and that both men were convicted to endure the full penalty of the laws they had outraged.

THE END.

The next number of the NICK CARTER WEEKLY (558) will contain, besides the usual departments, a complete long story, entitled "Kid Curry's Last Stand; or, Nick Carter in Dangerous Surroundings."

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## TALKS WITH OUR READERS.

Some of the wonderful things Nick Carter does have been equaled in the scientific world, as the following will prove:

What the drop of water does to the hardest stone is quite eclipsed by what a thread of yarn can accomplish. In a certain convict establishment a prisoner who was supposed to be breaking stones was discovered to be surreptitiously "working" at one of the bars to an outside window. The man was hauled before the governor, and finally admitted what he was doing, and was induced to give a demonstration. A grating of the same description was placed in his cell, and a guard stationed over him to exact the proof of the statement. With dust and pounded silicate from the stone-heap, the yarn from his sock, and a little water this man cut the steel bar in eighteen working-hours. Supplied with some fine emery, a chalk-line, and two wooden handholds to save his fingers, he made the other clean cut of the bar in five hours, proving the possibility of achieving what he aimed at to the convincing of the authorities. Needless to say, the patient and ingenious prisoner is occupied otherwise now; and it is to be hoped that good conduct on his part may gain him amelioration instead of prolonged punishment.

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Years ago, when such a rush was being made to the gold-diggings, a man who had "struck oil" was riding from the claims to the nearest town to deposit his "chips," when he was thrown from his horse in the center of a prairie and seriously hurt. He lay for hours unconscious. When he came to it was night, and no sign of habitation; no human being could be seen as he cast his eyes round the dreary waste. All through the night he lay parched with thirst and racked with terrible pain. As morning dawned he felt all the agonies of the last struggle of departing life, and he looked despairingly about him. At that moment he saw a horseman approaching, who in a few moments came up to him.

"All in this log for a drink of water," was the appeal that met his ears.

"Mate," he replied, "never mind about the bag, drink." The other did drink, he drank ravenously, and the sweeper, who happened to be a new arrival from the old country, stood by the wounded fellow and did his best for him until he was able to proceed by slow stages. On the other's recovery he was compelled to accept half of his "chips"—some hundreds in value; and, shortly after, the two returned to the claims together, ultimately selling after they had accumulated a fortune.

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Who has not heard of the comparatively fabulous sums given for old, used postage stamps?—mere pieces of paper in most people's eyes. Yet a single one has fetched as much as $1,250 from a collector who needed it to help complete his "wants."

Again, miniature paintings have fetched their thousands of dollars, while the price of diamonds is too well known to need repetition here. The few subjects which we have touched upon, however, will go far toward proving that it is not by any means the biggest articles which fetch the biggest sums, but in most cases the smallest.

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The finest pearl ever fished up from the sea enveloping the Sulu Archipelago was recently marketed in Singapore for 60,000 pesos, equal to nearly $30,000. It is the size of a small marble, globular, and perfect in color. The finding of the gem by a poor Moro fisherman, its seizure by the Sultan of Sulu, and the interference of Governor Steever, who took the part of the poor fisherman, make up an interesting incident.

Under the old Moro law, in force when the American troops first took charge of Jolo, all pearls of unusual size were ordered to be sent to the sultan, who in return made the finder a "present." The only alternative the finder of a large pearl had was to sell his treasure to the pearl-traders secretly. This placed his life in jeopardy, for if the trader could not buy the gem at his own price he could report the matter to the sultan, who had the power to seize the finder and execute him. Under American rule, however, this law has been abolished. The discoverer of the very valuable pearl above referred to, knowing this fact, when his find was seized by the sultan, speedily made a trip to Jolo and reported the matter to Governor Steever. The matter was taken to court, and the sultan forced to give up the pearl.

So far as is known, this pearl is the largest ever taken from the Sulu Sea, though, owing to the secrecy practised in selling the gems prior to American rule in Sulu, there may have been greater finds. Three years ago a pearl found somewhere to the south of Jolo was carried to Batavia, and there sold to a European buyer for $18,000.

During a recent fair at Jolo, got up by the government for the purpose of bringing the Moros together, a magnificent black pearl, valued at $7,000, of unusual size and beauty, was exhibited.

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A correspondent and reader, who has been appearing with a traveling showman, sends in the following interesting communication:

Once I passed such a night of terror that even now I can scarcely repress a shudder when I look at a caged tiger.

At the time the incident happened my uncle was the chief owner of a menagerie, which was then in its winter quarters; and adjoining stood his residence, from which a private side door opened into the building where the animals were confined.

One midnight, when I was staying with him, after all was quiet, both in my uncle's house and the menagerie, I conceived the purpose which was the source of all my danger and fright. Although but fourteen years of age, I took a lantern, passed through the side door, and stood alone—the only human being—inside that dark building.

My purpose was to find a bunch of keys, in charge of the head keeper, whom I knew to be off for part of the night, and to select from the bunch the key to the cage where was kept a pet goat, which my uncle had promised me, and which was to

go with me, at a very early hour in the morning, to my father's house in the country.

I wished to take the goat now and secure it in the yard outside the menagerie, because I feared, boylike, that my uncle would forget his promise.

I had no thought of fear as I entered, and well remember how boldly I advanced between the rows of cages, cutting the darkness right and left with my lantern's bright rays. But suddenly, having neared the far end of the menagerie most remote from the street I was appalled to behold a huge cage wide open in front of me, and upon its floor, crouching, unchained and glaring directly at me, a royal Bengal tiger.

Overcome with terror, I fell, lantern in hand, upon my knees, and in that position stared at the fierce animal in an agony of unspeakable fear. Great drops of perspiration stood cold on my forehead, and the rapid thumping of my heart sounded in my ears like muffled drum-beats.

Ten minutes—which seemed to me as many hours—of this dreadful suspense passed; and then, as the tiger did not move toward me, the thought crossed my mind, should I not move from him? But were I to stir, might not my movement excite a rival activity on his part? And what chance should I have, a poor little mouse, under the eye of that great feline.

Before I could reach the side door and open it, I should be within the grasp of the pursuing tiger. The thought of the cruel death menacing me filled me with indescribable horror.

But I dare not stir, and so remained where I had fallen, hoping by keeping quiet to delude the tiger into the belief that I was not an object to tempt his appetite; but as I gazed up at his rapacious face, I wondered why he was so tardy with such an unexpected meal trembling before him.

I had been in my recumbent position for, I should judge, three hours, every moment apprehensive of some sudden change in the attitude of the tiger, for he seemed only waiting for me to move to spring upon me, when I heard the voice of one of the keepers outside in the street. He was in conversation with some one. Then his companion went away, and I heard the keeper's key in the door.

Life was sweet at that supreme moment, and I selfishly resolved, in my boyish heart, to remain motionless and let the man, as he approached, take the tiger's first spring.

I heard the door shut. The tiger remained quiet. I heard the keeper walking toward me. Still the tiger did not stir.

"Hello!" exclaimed the man, standing over me in astonishment and touching me with his foot. "What are you doing here, boy—at this time of night, too?"

I looked up furtively, motioned him to hush, and pointed to the tiger.

"What; are you afraid of that—a stuffed tiger?" he shouted, laughing so heartily that a lion in his cage near-by growled at being disturbed at such an unseemly hour.

"Stuffed?" I repeated, in a most disgusted tone of voice, as I scrambled to my feet. "That a stuffed tiger?"

And so it was; for, as the keeper explained, this royal Bengal tiger had been dead three months; but, having been so large and finely marked, my uncle had had him stuffed by a Frenchman, and sent home on the preceding evening.

This, then, accounted for my miraculous escape, and no thanks to my prudence in keeping quiet so long. I have only to add that I got my goat, and went home with him early next morning.

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Perhaps the most curious prison in the world is that which is to be found in the breezy island of Sark. They have very good people in that pleasant spot in the English Channel, and crime is so infrequent that an "open-door" jail is the only penal institution in the whole place. There are very few arrests indeed. Almost the last was that of a woman accused of stealing handkerchiefs. She was placed in prison, and all of the sympathizing women of the island sat around the door and told her stories to pass away the time. The next morning she walked out to the magistrate's house and asked whether he would release her if she promised to be good and not steal any more handkerchiefs. He said she might go, and formally released her.

---

When a child in Patagonia is ill, a messenger is despatched for the doctor, and never leaves him until he comes. As soon as the doctor arrives, he looks at the sick child, and then, with much ceremony, rolls it up in a piece of skin. He then orders a clay plaster, and by this time the child has ceased crying, soothed by the warmth of the skin, and so renders still more solid his reputation as a wise man. Yellow clay is brought and made into a thick cream with water, and the child is painted from head to foot, causing him to cry again.

"The evil spirit is still there," says the doctor sagely, and undoes two mysterious packages he carries; one contains rhea sinews and the other a rattle made of stones, in a gourd decorated with feathers. He then fingers the sinews, muttering something for a few minutes, then he seizes the rattle and shakes it violently, staring very hard at the crying child, then wraps it in the skin again and it ceases crying.

Again it is painted, rattled at, and stared at, and again it cries. This is done four times, and then the cure is considered complete. The doctor leaves the child quiet, enfolded in the warm skin, and goes his way, having received two pipefuls of tobacco as his fee.

Strange to say, the child generally recovers; but if it does not, the doctor gets out of the difficulty by declaring that the parents did not keep the medicine-skin tightly round the child, and so let the evil spirit get back again. This is the only treatment that children in Patagonia, however ill, are ever known to receive.

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## A PERILOUS SITUATION.

BY G. A. ALLERTON.

In the spring, some years ago, my brother Fred and I broke away from the old home, and went West to make our fortunes. After drifting about for some time, we found ourselves on the banks of a stream in southern Kansas, called the Medicine River.

We erected a double shanty on the line between our claims, so that we lived together, and yet each was on his own land. Other men seeking homes soon came, many bringing their families, and before long we had several near neighbors. Better houses than dugouts and sod shanties began to be in demand, and as Fred and I were handy with tools, we soon had plenty of work.

Among the cliffs in our vicinity were vast quantities of gypsum rock, which, when burned in a kiln, is finer and better for plaster than lime. Our supply of gypsum was nearly exhausted when a neighbor called on us to build a house for him. Thus it was that, while Fred went to see about the timbers, he sent me to find a fresh deposit of gypsum, and, if possible, one more easily got at than any we had yet found.

While on my tramp I was suddenly overtaken by a genuine cyclone.

A huge oak stood on a hill before me, but I knew too well the danger I incurred by seeking shelter under it. A hundred yards down the slope to the east was an immense boulder, behind which I hastily concluded to

crouch, if nothing better offered. Down the hill I dashed, hearing in the distance the dull crashing of the storm.

On rounding it I was greatly surprised to find a hole in the rocky ground large enough to admit my body. I knelt and peered in. It seemed to be a cave some ten or twelve feet deep, but I could see little of the interior. It would afford me shelter from the storm—but suppose I should find in it a bear or a mountain lion!

A sudden darkening of the air, and a deafening crash from the timber on the other side of the hill decided me. Even a mountain lion was better than a cyclone, so I gently lowered myself, feet first. The hole by which I entered was in the roof of the cave near the east side. The wall I found to be rugged and sloping, so that I climbed to the floor without accident. There was also a circular hole in the center of the roof, which answered the purpose of a skylight, though only about two feet in diameter.

This was all I had time to notice when the storm broke in awful fury. There was a terrible roar as the wind swept over the openings; then there was a heavy jar, and the cave grew suddenly dark. Looking up, to note the cause, I was horror-struck. A single glance showed me that I had found something worse than mountain lions. The oak on top of the hill had been torn up and hurled down the slope against the boulder, which it had rolled over the hole, thus imprisoning me.

Hastily I climbed up the sloping wall, and strove to roll the stone away, though I well knew that a dozen men could not stir it. It was all in vain.

Giddy and sick at heart, I climbed down to the floor and looked up at the skylight. Part of the tree lay across the hole, and a limb hung temporarily inside, as if to taunt me with an offer of help that was several feet beyond my grasp. I was a mouse in a jug.

As I stood there, gazing wistfully at the mouth of my jug, my ear caught the sound of running water. I hurried to examine this new feature, remembering that I had not yet explored my cell. It was quickly done. I was in a cave about twelve feet each way, with neither stick nor stone to build a scaffold to raise me to the opening in the roof.

A good stream of muddy water was pouring in at the side of the cave next to the little gully which I had noticed. I found a crevice in the rock, by which the water entered, but it was not nearly large enough to allow me to escape.

The wind had died away as suddenly as it had risen, and rain was pouring down in torrents. Soon I noticed that the water was coming in much more rapidly than it went out.

Here was a new horror. Not only was I a mouse in a jug, but some one was pouring water into the jug.

Feeling suddenly faint, I sat down on the wet rock, and tried to realize my situation. I was young, and life was full of charm for me. How could I give it up, and in such a miserable, ignoble way?

I was not a coward; I had faced death in the form of fierce beasts and fiercer men, and had never flinched. But to die in a hole, with no effort to escape, no hope—it was horrible!

Soon the water had risen to where I sat. I was almost driven mad by its demoniac laughter. Chuckling, gurgling, fairly shouting with fiendish glee, it came dancing about me, seeming to rejoice that I was so helpless, that I was a mouse in a jug.

Frantic with rage at its hollow, mocking mirth, I dashed up the rugged wall, and strove to roll the stone from my tomb.

In vain. Hercules himself could not have done it.

Higher and higher rose the water, and more and more frantic were my efforts. I prayed, I raved, I laughed and sang, and anon burst into childish tears, but the water never ceased chuckling, and rose steadily all the while. I could not cling long to the wall, and the water was soon up to my armpits. A little longer and it was up to my chin, and I could hardly keep my footing.

By this time I was calmer, for my panic had worn me out, and the icy water was fast benumbing me. When it lifted me from my feet, I strove to shake off the torpor I felt stealing over me, and struck out mechanically to keep myself afloat. For some time I kept up the effort, until, looking up, the thought occurred to me that if I could only keep up long enough the water might lift me within reach of the limb of the skylight.

The water now rose more slowly, for it had risen to the hole by which I had entered, and some was escaping there. Though hope renewed had increased my strength for the moment, I realized that I was fast failing, and the effort must come soon, or I should be unable to draw my cramped and chilled body through the opening.

Sinking low in the water, I leaped with all my strength toward the limb, still some feet above my head. Falling short, I dropped back, and went completely under. As I rose to the surface, taking advantage of the momentum already acquired, I made one supreme effort, and seized the limb. Even now I marvel at the strength I still retained, enabling me to climb out and fall fainting on the ground.

It was almost a fortnight later when I regained consciousness.

I had arrived home near midnight, bruised, torn, haggard, and raving with the delirium of brain fever brought on by that terrible experience.

## THE DETECTIVE'S CLUE.

BY MARAH CROSSE.

Old Hampden was dead—murdered.

It seemed odd that it could be so, that morning as I walked up the wide avenue leading to the great stone building that had stood on Hampden Heights for a hundred years.

I served the family the first thing I ever did, and had grown old and gray in their employ. I little thought the last service I should ever do for John Hampden would be to hunt down his murderer and bring him to justice.

He had been buried three weeks, when they telegraphed for me, and, on my arrival, not caring to go to the house first, I crossed the wide park and entered the enclosure set apart as the burial-place of the Hampden dead.

Long lines of glittering monuments proclaimed the fact that these silent sleepers had been of a short-lived race, for the gleaming columns told of men cut off in their prime.

I passed on to the last grave, a long, narrow mound of fresh-heaped earth, and read on the tall white stone:

"JOHN HAMPDEN—AGED 55 YEARS."

This man, who slept beneath the turf at my feet, had

been my friend, and above his lowly bed I vowed that justice should be done him.

From the cemetery I went to the house, up into the room where they had found him lying so ghastly and grim, on that memorable afternoon.

It was a large, square apartment, the floor covered with a white velvet carpet, sprinkled over with bunches of royally crimson roses; the walls were lined with rare pictures, and the large windows hung with costly curtains. He was found sitting in his armchair, his secretary open before him, one arm resting on the table at his side, and a pile of old torn letters scattered around him, upon which the blood lay in congealed masses.

One swift, certain blow had put an end to his life.

I walked slowly around the room.

As yet no one was suspected, and it was acknowledged to be as difficult a case as any ever put into the hands of the police.

The best detectives in the city had examined the house and failed to find a clue. I could hardly hope to do better than they had done, but I made the circuit of the apartment three times. I examined the doors, then the windows, and finally, without the least idea of finding anything, glanced behind the screen that half-shut out the fireplace; for John Hampden, having a fondness for old-time ways, clung to the broad stone hearths and wide chimneys of ancient days.

For a moment I was startled at what I saw, but recovering myself, I stooped down and examined it.

There, firmly stamped in the half-baked ashes, was the imprint of a boot, a singularly made affair, looking as though the foot that wore it was deformed.

It came over me like a flash. The murderer had concealed himself in the room, and, coming on his victim unawares, had dealt the fatal blow and then made his escape through the chimney.

I went out of the house and passed round to the eastern side, where the low, moss-covered stone wall was loose and crumbling. It was in a direct line with the chimney, and I was convinced the murderer had made use of it in getting away.

Down by this wall I crept, and searching with the keen scent of a sleuth-hound, found the same queer marks on the damp, soft earth on the other side.

A horse had been tethered in a clump of trees not far away, and there, hidden in the rotten end of a decaying log, I found the boot itself, stiff with human gore.

So the divine will had selected me to unravel this mystery, and, picking up the clue, I returned to my hotel.

The name of the manufacturer of the boot was stamped on the inside, and taking the down train the next morning, I called at his office.

I described the article, and asked him the name of his customer.

"His name is Hughes," replied the bootmaker, "and I am now making him another pair. He will call for them in less than an hour."

"Please detain him until I return, if I should not be in when he comes," I said.

The bootmaker looked surprised.

"By what right do you command such a thing?"

"This!"

I opened my coat and showed the glittering star, that shone brightly as the sunshine rested on it.

A shadow rested for a moment on the door-sill and a half-suppressed imprecation reached my ears. I looked up, and standing before me, his eyes riveted on the glimmering badge of my office, was a man whom I instinctively felt to be the one for whom I was seeking.

He suspected my object, for as I advanced toward him he turned and fled down the street.

"That was the very man!" cried the dealer.

"I thought so," I replied, and hastily leaving the shop, I hurried to the chief of police. Like a swift flash the wires of the telegraph had carried a minute description of the assassin to all points in the city, and the outlets of escape were effectually closed.

But like a fox under cover, he kept us at bay, and it was two weeks and over ere, in the densely populated city, I found him.

One evening a lady and two gentlemen stopped at the hotel where I boarded, and engaged rooms. One of the gentlemen was very ill, and muffled completely in shawls and comforters. As I listened to his sharp, gasping cough as they carried him to his apartment, I thought he could not possibly last many months longer; and when, next morning, he was reported to be a great deal worse, I was not surprised.

I often sent up fruit and little delicacies to tempt his appetite, and once went to his door; but he declined to see me, stating that he was really too ill and dispirited to see any one.

The next thing I heard was of his death, and his wife, a young and elegant-looking lady, wrote me a note, asking me to send the undertaker to them.

I watched the hearse drive up to the door the next morning, to convey the corpse to the train, for it had been his request to have his body buried in his native State, and yielding to an uncontrollable impulse, I followed the body, and seated myself near the coffin after it had been deposited in the baggage-car.

His wife wept profusely, and would not leave the corpse, so the officials made her as comfortable as possible where she was.

The lady seemed very nervous, and after a while asked me if it would not be more pleasant for me to sit with the other passengers. But I preferred to remain where I was. My eyes could not and would not leave that dismal coffin, and I looked at it so long and attentively that it seemed as if every nail and curve would be branded on my memory forever.

At last I walked up to it, and was about to turn back the reversible lid that covered the glass over the face, when she sprang at me with a wild cry.

What before had been in my mind only a vague something, shaped itself suddenly into a strong suspicion, and throwing back the lid, I pushed her off and looked in.

There, with his mouth and nose pressed closely to a small aperture in the side of the coffin, his eyes staring blindly into mine, and his livid face covered with great drops of sweat, was the man for whom I was seeking—the murderer of John Hampden.

He was not yet recovered from the effects of the drug he had taken, and I secured him easily, and bore him back in triumph to Hampden jail, where he was eventually tried, convicted, and hung.

Smarting for years under a fancied wrong, his soul had thirsted for revenge, and entering the room when deserted, Hughes waited for his victim, and with one blow ended his life.

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